THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD AND JONAH'S GOURD VINE: ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON THE EFFECTS OF IDENTITY, GENDER, AND RACE IN THE BILDUNGSROMAN GENRE

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Cameron, for his support, input, and understanding.

And to our daughters Kaleah, Lillian, and India, for their smiles when I needed them.

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"The whole of life, from the moment
you are born to the moment you die,
is a process of learning."
–Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

Introduction

One of the really beautiful characteristics of art is its insistence on self-discovery. For the writer, the painter, or the musician, the creative process is the most important part of the work. It helps her find something in her soul that no one else possesses – something that is uniquely hers. This element of discovery is something that each of its spectators can relate to and appreciate; it is what makes the art relevant and vital. We all, at one time or another, search for our own identity, or our discovery of self. This search is what unites us and at the same time makes each of us unique.

In literature this drive for revelation, for personal growth, is central to the development of the genre called "Bildungsroman." According to Jerome Hamilton Buckley in his book, Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding, "the Bildungsroman in its pure form has been defined as the 'novel of all-around development or self-culture' with 'a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by his experience'" (13). The steps that Buckley outlines as a general framework for the Bildungsroman are: "childhood, the

conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy" (18). Buckley also notes that a common, though not necessary feature of the Bildungsroman, is that "the growing child, as he appears in these novels, more often than not will be orphaned or at least fatherless" (19). The quintessential example of the traditional Bildungsroman is Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1795). This story is arguably the first of its kind in that the protagonist, a young man, embarks on a journey of self-realization that culminates in an actualized adulthood. Other examples of this type of story are Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), Charles Dickens' Great Expectations (1861), and Louisa May Alcott's Little Women (1868) among many others. Each of these stories follows, more or less, the traditional steps of the Bildungsroman enumerated above in which the protagonist must go through an ordeal in which the innocence of childhood is altered by the experiences of adolescence and young adulthood to emerge with a clarified and enhanced perspective.

When the Bildungsroman is applied to the culture in which it was developed, in a mostly Northern European context, it follows a fairly predictable path. However, when this framework of the Bildungsroman is applied to a culture with the unique circumstances of African Americans, the structure, rules, and the general outcome can be greatly altered. This altered narrative of self-development in two novels by Zora Neale Hurston is my focus in this thesis. In her book Ten is the Age of Darkness: the Black Bildungsroman, Geta LeSeur states that "the African American novelist tends to use personal experience [in the Bildungsroman] in order to make a viable protest that is

almost always about race, slave history, and the White establishment" (1). The African American tradition of autobiography and Bildungsroman hold a unique place in their respective genres. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, in her article "Bildung in Ethnic Women Writers," underscores the symbiotic nature of the autobiography and the Bildungsroman when she says that "Viewed theoretically, the Bildungsroman may be defined as a more or less autobiographical novel, reflecting an author's desire to universalize personal experience in order to valorize personal identity" (77). This observation is useful because it allows us to hear the story of the author herself within the fiction that she has created to form, paradoxically, a unique yet collective narrative which speaks to the experiences and desires of her readership.

There is good reason why in the history of African American literature, including the Bildungsroman genre, there is a theme of assertion – especially in the slave narrative and reaction against the dominant culture and self. It is demanded by the circumstances of the history of the people. Martha K. Cobb, in her essay, "The Slave Narrative and the Black Literary Tradition," explains that

> The slave narrative represents a fusion of three predominant themes. The first is the struggle for freedom, both psychic and physical. The second is the resolving of oppositions, the polarities that confront slave life from birth to death: order and disorder, black and white, slave and free, ignorance and knowledge, poverty and wealth, despair and hope. The third sustained theme embodies the first two, but goes even deeper. It is a persistent defining and interpreting of personal, human, and moral identity, hence one's worth, on the slave narrator's own terms rather than on terms imposed by the society that has enslaved him or her. (38)

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his book The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism, also explains the importance and place of the slave narrative:

> Writing could be no mean thing in the life of the slave. What was at stake for the earliest black authors was nothing less than the implicit testimony to their humanity, a common humanity which they sought to demonstrate through the very writing of a text of an ex-slave's life. (171)

While the narrator of the typical slave narrative ultimately attempts to define herself in her own terms, she still does so in contrast to the dominant culture. While this type of writing, referring to oneself in terms of another, particularly an oppressor who has denied the humanity of the writer and the group that he represents, is understandable and profoundly justified, it is not the only method that can be employed to assert selfhood and humanity. In fact, it may give unintended power to the oppressor. If the culture of the oppressor continues to be recognized as the norm in which the oppressed culture wishes to be included, then the oppressor is still wielding a type of authority.

Writing in an other-referential style may be a common vehicle for many African American authors who utilize the Bildungsroman genre in their work, but it is not characteristic of all of them. Zora Neale Hurston uses the Bildungsroman as a refutation of the circumstances that make the traditional African American use of the Bildungsroman necessary. Hurston takes Cobb's third step of the purpose of the slave narrative even further; she not only defines her value and the value of her characters on her own terms, but she does not recognize that any other option – of defining herself in anyone else's terms – is a possibility. My analysis of her novels Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) and Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934) will illuminate how Hurston's ability and desire to celebrate the significance of her cultural heritage allows her to create a Bildungsroman distinct from that of the traditional form as well as from that which other ethnic writers were producing.

Martin Japtok observes in his book Growing Up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction that a problem often arises in the traditional ethnic Bildungsroman, one that, I argue, does not seem to plague Hurston's writing:

> Protagonist-centered writing thus serves as a communication medium for ethnic writers: on the one hand, they share life experiences with other members of the writer's ethnic community; on the other hand, they communicate "authentic" views of ethnic life to mainstream readers. The works examined in this study mean to dispel ethnic stereotypes and are counter-narratives to a prevailing anti-Semitic and anti-African American reality. At the same time, they are, to a greater or lesser degree, beholden to essentialist conceptualizations of ethnicity, and thus they cannot avoid creating new stereotypes, which are sometimes old stereotypes with new valorizations. (25)

Hurston, in her purposeful exclusion of mainstream society, avoids this undesirable result. She does not create new stereotypes about African Americans because her characters inhabit an insular world. Hurston's method of storytelling makes almost no reference to anything outside of the immediate culture of her characters. These characters exist in an imperfect utopia – often the Eatonville, Florida of her youth – made up almost entirely of other African Americans. There are very few references in any of her stories to Caucasians or Anglo culture. Even when she includes them, they are most often secondary to the plot.

The benefit of this method, as my analysis of these novels will demonstrate, is that all of her characters' actions and circumstances are almost entirely self-referential, emphasizing the autonomy of African Americans to define themselves without reference to the dominant Anglo culture. As Joanne Braxton explains in her book Black Women Writing Autobiography :

> Hurston and Era Bell Thompson represent the first generation of black and female autobiographers who did not continually come into contact with former slaves; their works turn away from the restrictions and limitations of the slave narrative and extend the quest for a dignified and self-defining identity to include a search for personal fulfillment. (144)

This aspect of her storytelling is not meant to exclude any other cultures on the basis of race; I argue that it is employed so that Hurston's characters can simply develop as human beings without reference to any other race or pre-conceived ideas of behavior.

As Hurston says in her 1942 autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road, "I found that I had no need of either class or race prejudice, those scourges of humanity. The solace of easy generalization was taken from me, but I received the richer gift of individualism [...] All clumps of people turn out to be individuals on close inspection" (323). In this succinct statement, Hurston not only acknowledges the importance of recognizing individuality, but she also recognizes the "clumps of people" who hold an imperative place in the ethnic Bildungsroman – the community. This element of reference to her own community was also a point of contention at the time that she was writing and is a fundamental facet of her work that sets her apart from other African American authors of the time, as I will develop later in this section.

Hurston achieves the goal of explicating and celebrating her heritage through her Bildungsroman vehicle. She does not follow the specific characteristics of the African American Bildungsroman. The most important difference in her version of the genre, and my focus in this thesis, is her examination and treatment of ethnicity and gender without reference to outside culture, using relationships with parents, spouses, and community as a vehicle to advance the Bildungsroman narrative.

What is unique about Hurston is that she was writing these revisionary self-development narratives during the early to mid-part of the twentieth century (her first short story, "John Redding Goes to Sea," was published in a campus magazine at Howard University in 1921 and her last major work, Seraph on the Suwanee, appeared in 1948). This was a time of widespread change and uncertainty in the United States. The failure of Reconstruction after the Civil War was a very difficult time for African Americans. Backlash from whites, particularly in the south, trying to re-assert their authority, often resulted in even more virulent and violent behavior towards African Americans than before Reconstruction.[1] A strong need for not only individual, but communal identity took root. Japtok perceives that

> autobiography and Bildungsroman are forms that flourish in unstable times. Particularly the period around the turn of the century marks wide-scale immigration and the aftershocks from the failure of the Reconstruction, making it a highly unstable era for both African Americans and Jewish Americans. (24)

Japtok states almost paradoxically that "an assertion of individuality makes sense in the face of a denial of individuality, or even of humanity, because of one's group affiliation" (24). In fact, the depiction of the necessity of community is a unique factor in the African American Bildungsroman and is one that Hurston wholeheartedly embraces in her fiction.

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[1] [V]iolence, an intrinsic part of the process of social change since 1865, now directly entered electoral politics. Founded in 1866 as a Tennessee social club, the Ku Klux Klan spread into nearly every Southern state, launching a "reign of terror" against Republican leaders black and white. [...] In Louisiana, even moderate ex-Governor Hahn by October complained that "murder and intimidation are the order of the day in this state." White gangs roamed New Orleans, intimidating blacks and breaking up Republican meetings. In St. Landry Parish, a mob invaded the plantations, killing as many as 200 blacks. Commanding Gen. Lovell Rousseau, a friend and supporter of the President, refused to take action, urging blacks to stay away from the polls for self-protection and exulting that the "ascendance of the negro in this state is approaching its end." (Foner 146)

As Japtok observes,

> While both traditional Bildungsroman and autobiography heavily emphasize the protagonist and his/her development, and thus individualism, their ethnic equivalents seem to give more room to others. While autobiography and Bildungsroman allow for an assertion of individuality, the very fact that the denial of one's individuality by the mainstream stems from the latter's view of one's ethnic group necessitates a dual strategy on the part of ethnic authors. [...] In other words, ideological pressures work on the ethnic autobiography and Bildungsroman, pushing them towards a more communal worldview. (25)

Hurston's fiction and non-fiction embrace the idea of community, but she did not subscribe to the same sense of community that many of her contemporaries demanded of her. For writers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright, their strongest criticism of Hurston was not that she did not contribute to a communal view; it was that she refused to produce what was known as "protest literature." Du Bois asserts in the January 1926 issue of The Crisis, for which he was an editor, "We want especially to stress the fact that while we believe in Negro art we do not believe in any art simply for art's sake... We want Negro writers to produce beautiful things but we stress the things rather than the beauty" (115). The most important aspect of art, in his view and the view of many African American leaders and writers of the time, was that it be a mouthpiece for the cause of the people. All literature that was produced within this mandate was under a moral obligation to protest the current state of the African American in America. According to Michael Awkward in his introduction to New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God, Richard Wright, another leading author of the time,

> [s]aw black expressive art as a blunt weapon to be used to expose the effects upon Euro-Americans and Afro-Americans of what he was later to term the white "force" of American racism... [Hurston's] work

> demonstrated a faith in Afro-American people and in the strength of their culture and its belief systems which Wright's work seems clearly to lack. (12)

We can see in the language of Awkward that Wright was perceived as more of a militant than Hurston. Words like "blunt weapon," "white 'force'" and the like allow us to begin to understand the ferocity with which Wright and others were acting to make a particular political statement about the treatment of African Americans. Gates explains the mindset of African American authors and artists who were contemporaries of Hurston:

> [I]t should not surprise us that the search for a voice in black letters became a matter of grave concern among the black literati. This concern, as we might expect, led to remarkable polemical debates over the precise register which an "authentic" black voice would, or could, assume. (171)

Hurston's refusal to limit her art to this one objective and to speak only in a voice that was sanctioned by her peers caused her to be denied status as a serious proponent of her culture and heritage while she was alive. Robert Hemenway, in his biography of Hurston, gives an example of the type of response that Hurston received from many critics. He cites Nathan Huggins, author of The Harlem Renaissance (1971), who he says "traces the intellectual and social history of the era, and his extensive interviews and detailed research have contributed much that is new and valuable to our understanding of the period" (80). When dealing with Zora Hurston, however, Hemenway summarizes Huggins's complaints as follows:

> Hurston's "common, rural Negro" with his "superstitions and habits of mind" did not give the reader fully developed characters but "fold types." Graced with "the speech of the lowly, rural Negro," Hurston's characters were "robust and passionate: men and women who "lived for the instant" and whose "life and mind were uncomplicated." (80)

Hemenway concludes that "Huggins considers this a sentimental view made even more artificial because Hurston's folktales were not even authentic: The line between Zora Hurston's mind and her material was never clear" (80). Though Huggins wrote his book long after the "end" of the Harlem Renaissance, he still shares the opinion held by many of Hurston's contemporaries that her stories were no more than amusing folktales that had little relevance to the objective at the time of furthering the cause of racial equality.

In contrast, Hemenway argues,

> The reason there was no clear line between Zora Hurston's mind and her material is that she operated from within a different esthetic, one which made no distinctions between the lore inherited by successive generations of old and the imagination with which each generation adapted the tradition and made the lore its own. Hurston alone, among all the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, understood this principle of folk process. (80)

Hemenway is saying that Hurston was unique in her understanding of the way that the folk tales of her predecessors, transformed with each generation's understanding of them, affected the daily lives of herself and her contemporaries. She used this awareness to create fiction that spoke to the underlying hopes of her readership to reclaim their heritage.

Harold Bloom, in his introduction to Zora Neale Hurston, discerns that "Power in Hurston is always potentia, the demand for life, for more life. Despite the differences in temperament, Hurston has affinities both with Dreiser and with Lawrence, heroic vitalists. Her art, like theirs, exalts an exuberance that is beauty, a difficult beauty because it participates in reality-testing" (3). The essential source of conflict between Hurston and Du Bois was in what their concept of "power" was. Du Bois believed that it

existed extrinsically and was acquired through political means. Hurston believed that it is intrinsic in each individual – it just had to be tapped and applied to each person's reality.

Hurston's perspective on the issue can be seen in her essay "How It Feels to be Colored Me":

> Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the grand-daughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said "On the line!" The Reconstruction said "Get set!"; and the generation before said "Go!" I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep. (152)

While many of Hurston's contemporaries and even critics today may say that Hurston was willfully blind to the plight that African Americans still face in their day-to-day struggles for equality and respect, one cannot deny that the sentiment behind her words – the deliberate decision to demand as non-negotiable her ability to live her life as an individual without superfluous restrictions – was courageous in that it has the effect of revising the self-narratives it is possible to write Post-Reconstruction, as Their Eyes Were Watching God and Jonah's Gourd Vine demonstrate.

Darwin Turner notes in his essay, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Theory of a Black Aesthetic," that Du Bois also believed:

> American Negro Art [...] was a group expression consisting of biographies written by slaves and by free blacks who had achieved [in Du Bois' words] "...poetry portraying Negro life and aspirations, and activities, of essays on the "Negro Problem" and novels about the "Color Line." (15)

Hemenway argues that DuBois and others at the time, particularly Hurston's one-time-mentor-turned-fiercest-critic, Alain Locke, hated the fact that Hurston used dialect in her writing and depicted African Americans in aspects of everyday life that were considered, by some, embarrassing to the race.

Hemenway states, "Many black intellectuals believed that books by black authors needed to tell the 'total truth' to white America. Books about the race should aim to destroy the absurd beliefs and racist fantasies of the suppressing culture, and such books would necessarily at times be bitter" (219). This bitterness was not part of Hurston's style. In fact, one of her most famous statements, again in "How it Feels to be Colored Me," sums up Hurston's philosophy on race relations:

> I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world – I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife. (153)

Hurston's leaning toward idealism is refreshing, and perhaps even heroic. It is also problematic because regardless of whether she wishes it to be, she was considered a spokesperson for her race. Hemenway observes that criticism surrounding her work about folklore, Mules and Men, was indicative of some of the larger issues that Hurston was perhaps ignoring:

> Even if Hurston had consciously tried to avoid bitterness, [the criticism surrounding her work] was important. She had not been writing for pure entertainment [...] and she had offered a portrait of the race meant to be taken as a behavioral example. (220)

Hurston was simply not willing to acknowledge that the white aesthetic should be a deciding factor on the value of an African American aesthetic, nor vice versa.

As an anthropologist[2], Hurston "was not a racial separatist, but [...] conscious of cultural equity, trained to interpret one culture to another (Hemenway, xx). Her goal, to the dismay of many of her contemporaries, was not to elevate African Americans in the eyes of the Anglo culture, but to (re)assert confidence in the value of their own culture, their own sense of community. As Hemenway succinctly states, "[Hurston] felt that black culture manifested an independent esthetic system that could be discussed without constant reference to white oppression" (221). It is the universality of humanity within any community that she wanted to portray to her readers. She had to isolate a community, her community, so that she could celebrate its uniqueness based on its own merits without all the social and political baggage assigned to race relations.

It is within this dichotomy, as cultural transcendentalist – a person aware of the fact that each culture has its unique characteristics, but ultimately shares a universal humanity – and also anthropologist, that Hurston met her greatest obstacle. She summarizes her plight in Dust Tracks on a Road when she discusses her initial ideas regarding writing Jonah's Gourd Vine:

> What I wanted to tell was a story about a man, and from what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color. It seemed to me that the human beings I met reacted pretty much the same to the same stimuli. Different idioms, yes. Circumstances and conditions having power to influence, yes. Inherent difference, no. (206)

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[2] Huston entered Barnard in 1925 and studied anthropology under Franz Boas who, recognizing her genius, urged her to concentrate on folklore. Thereafter Hurston embarked on numerous field studies in many parts of the world (Hemenway 63).

Ironically her position as a writer, an individual who needs to express her inmost thoughts through the written word, to an audience that was larger than the community she was portraying in her novels, caused her, by default, to act as a spokesperson. She was caught between the ideals she wanted to convey and the ideals that her audience wanted to hear. She could not act as both an isolationist and a cultural interpreter which, by definition, includes other cultures.

Hurston's emphasis on community is instrumental to the progression and overall message of her work in the African American Bildungsroman as a whole. Braendlin underscores the importance of community, especially among female ethnic writers:

> [W]omen writers, including the doubly disenfranchised are revitalizing the [Bildungsroman] genre out of a sense of urgency that outweighs cynicism.[...] Bildungsromane by marginal women share with novels by Anglo-Jewish women an affirmation of personal and social goals, values, and ideals that many male authors have renounced because they believe life and self to be fictions, and fiction to be an entertainment rather than a truth. (86)

Female authors were, according to Braendlin, renewing a genre that seemed to lose importance in the eyes of their male counterparts. The importance of community in the African American Bildungsroman was, to Hurston, instrumental in building the community that she perhaps perceived to be lacking in the current political atmosphere.

However, as Hurston points out in Dust Tracks, "It took more than a community of skin color to make your love come down on you" (235). She recognized the fact that the community could also be a source of pain, but the most poignant aspect of it, the

thing she adored the most, was that it could be a reflection and affirmation of one's own existence.

In many of her stories, she uses the real-life setting of Joe Clark's store to depict and develop the role of the community in the lives of her characters. In her autobiography she describes Joe Clark's store and why it occupied such a prominent place in her stories:

> I know that Joe Clark's store was the heart and spring of the town … the right and the wrong, the who, when and why was passed on, and nobody doubted the conclusions … There were no discreet nuances of life on Joe Clark's porch. There were open kindnesses, anger, hate, love, envy and its kinfolks, but all emotions were naked, and nakedly arrived at. (Dust Tracks 61-62)

Relationships within the community provide some of the most powerful contexts that Hurston uses to further her protagonists' journeys. We see compelling evidence of this important role in Their Eyes Were Watching God in the relationship that Janie has with her best friend Pheoby as well as with the community in Eatonville and the one she meets on the muck. For John, in Jonah's Gourd Vine, the most important relationships he has outside of his marriage include that with his best friend Hambo as well as the omnipresent and often detrimental link to his congregation.

While the relationships the protagonist has with members of the community are vital to her story, the principle vehicle that Hurston uses to advance her version of the Bildungsroman is that of the relationship of the main character to his or her spouse(s). Both of the protagonists struggle to reconcile who they are in relation to the spouse who wants to shape his or her character or inadvertently helps to illuminate the protagonist's

soul often to the surprise of the protagonist him or herself. The results of this relationship are sometimes joyous and sometimes tragic.

The two main texts that I will analyze to illuminate the significance of relationships in Hurston's use and modification of the Bildungsroman genre are her novels Their Eyes Were Watching God and Jonah's Gourd Vine. In both of these novels, the protagonist is on a quest not only to find her or his place in the community, but her or his own identity. Hurston's unique contribution to this genre is that she uses the relationships each character has with his or her spouse or lover to get to self-actualization, or the culmination of the Bildungsroman journey – the "working philosophy," to return to Buckley's concept – using the filters of ethnicity and gender. The journey they each take starts within themselves but is only completed when they have to become who they are through the relationships that have helped to form their identities.

For both Janie Starks in Their Eyes Were Watching God and John Pearson in Jonah's Gourd Vine, the people who have the greatest influence in their lives are first, their immediate family; second, and most significantly, their spouses or lovers; and third, their communities. All of these characters have their own important role, but no role excludes the others. In a way, the ethnic Bildungsroman community could be likened to a spouse or to the larger immediate family. It is a dynamic relationship made of close bonds, a common history, and intense emotional involvement. There will be periods of contentment, annoyance, joy, anger, happiness and any multitude of emotions in turn, but ultimately it is always there to affirm us by our involvement with it. Each has a

cumulative effect on the protagonist and in some ways determines his or her fate. When placed in the context of Hurston's unique perspective on the Bildungsroman, we will see that the self-development of the protagonists rests not only on their ability or inability to understand their roles in these relationships, but also on their ability and desire to reconcile their individual story to the legacy of their community's expectations.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937): The Bildungsroman and the Female Narrative of Zora Neale Hurston

Hurston's 1937 novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God, begins with a poetic rumination on the nature of a person's dreams:

> Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.
>
> Now women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (1)

With this beginning, Hurston lays out for us the character of our protagonist. Janie Crawford Killicks Starks Woods is an idealist who will not allow her story to end in defeat. She is determined to make her life what she wants it to be regardless of what others may see as her reality. This philosophy of creating one's own reality is a testament to the strength of the human spirit to overcome obstacles to happiness. It reinforces the idea that happiness is internal and it can be learned. It is important, too, that gender is at the forefront of her story. Hurston is already saying that women's life

stories are different from men's, reminding us that the traditional Bildungsroman does not necessarily apply to Janie.

Ultimately, the defining symbol of Janie's search for self and place is also a life-affirming one – a tree. Early on in the novel Hurston stresses the cyclical and rejuvenating nature of life; she compares Janie's life to a "great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches" (8). This choice of personal symbol is important because it compares and contrasts two of the most important factors in life: chance and choice. We cannot choose the things that will happen to us ("things suffered and things enjoyed") but we can choose how we respond to them ("things done and undone"). Janie can see both hope and despair and knows that both will come and come again in their own time.

Janie's viewpoint regarding the cyclical nature of life is a reflection of Hurston's own attitude and is used to develop the notion of self-respect and worth that she infuses in her work. By emphasizing that the journey of life is subject to a cosmic balance, one can be reassured that the negative aspects are not permanent and can be used to work toward the good. Hurston's positive attitude can perhaps best be expressed in an anecdote that she relates in her autobiography from her childhood: "Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to 'jump at de sun.' We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground" (DTOAR 21).

Janie, upon returning to her home in Eatonville after leaving two years earlier with a man much younger than she, begins to tell Pheoby not only where she's been, but where she came from. Her story begins with an almost idyllic childhood. While Janie

has no mother or father, she does have a doting grandmother and a harmonious living situation. She talks about the eager playmates she had in the white children whose land she and her grandmother lived on:

> "'Mah grandma raised me. Mah grandma and de white folks she worked wid. [...] They was quality white folks [...] She had four gran'chillun on de place and all of us played together and dat's how come Ah never called mah Grandma nothin' but Nanny, 'cause dat's what everybody on de place called her." (8)

From what the reader can tell, Janie spent the early years of her life in a conflict-free environment. She even states that her grandmother worked *with* the white people, which is significant given the time and location in which the story takes place. Their relationship was so harmonious that Janie never took notice of the difference of skin color. In a key passage, Janie describes the occasion of a photograph taken of herself with white playmates. We see the seeds of Janie's Bildungsroman journey germinating here. In this passage the reader can see that Janie is not completely self-aware. She may know herself and her place in her current community, but she does not see the world, or her place in it, with an objective, camera-like eye:

> So when we looked at de picture and everybody got pointed out there wasn't nobody left except a real dark little girl with long hair standing by Eleanor. Dat's where Ah wuz s'posed to be, but Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, "where is me? Ah don't see me." (9)

This remark is revealing in a number of ways. First, it displays Janie's innocent and accepting nature; she only sees her friends as playmates and comrades, not different from herself – there is no conflict in her life thus far that would cause her to search anywhere else for happiness. Secondly, it highlights the theme of her entire story, her search for

herself and her identity. The anxiety that she displays upon not recognizing herself in the picture helps to spur her on to a sense of needing a greater self-awareness that will become a theme throughout her life.

The photo also serves as a metaphor for the need for placement within a community, which can serve as a mirror to oneself. Janie's only source of self-reference was a community of white children. She could not recognize and thus have the opportunity to appreciate her African American heritage or culture without a community for context.

She also, however, alludes to the trials to come as she does try to integrate herself into a community that she has not yet identified with: "Us lived dere havin' fun till de chillum at school got to teasin' me 'bout livin' in de white folks' back-yard" (9). Janie goes on to tell of one girl, Mayrella, who would make her life miserable when she "would pick at me all de time and put some others up tuh do de same" (9). Already we see what a strong effect the community has on Janie's confidence and happiness.

As with many Bildungsroman stories, the conflict that can arise as a result of the differing visions between the young hero and the older relative also eventually erupts between Janie and her grandmother. The theme of the tree which is present throughout the novel is one way to begin to understand the bread between Nanny and Janie. Through this metaphor, the reader is able to better understand the desires of Janie's heart. With the initial introduction of the theme, "Dawn and doom in its branches," we understand the all-encompassing characteristics of nature. At the beginning of Janie's search for self, she sees only the excitement of the blossoming of life. As far as Janie is

concerned, the only thing that matters in life is the excitement of the mysteries of spring as a metaphor for the beginning of her own life:

> Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously [...] The rose of the world was breathing out smell. It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other vaguely felt matters that had struck her outside observation and buried themselves in her flesh. Now they emerged and quested about her consciousness...Oh to be a pear tree – *any* tree in bloom! (10-11)

On a very primal level, Janie is imbibing the powerful and intoxicating elixir of life. She is being infused with an unconscious love of energy and affirmation. These positive forces that she is channeling are very powerful conduits in her journey to finding her identity. We will see throughout the novel how the image of the tree reflects Janie's state of mind and reflects the decisions that she makes.

Unfortunately, other people in her life do not understand her desire for self-affirming love and are therefore fearful of this tincture that colors Janie's soul. Janie's grandmother has a strong first hand in trying to get Janie to live in what Nanny considers "reality," thereby altering the path that Janie would have initially followed. The conflict begins when her grandmother sees her physically start to embrace her sensuality and sexuality and she is afraid for Janie. Since her own life and the life of her daughter have been shaped by systematic sexual violence, she is terrified that Janie will encounter the same fate. When she catches Janie impulsively kissing Johnny Taylor she decides that Janie cannot be allowed to be so reckless. Nanny cannot understand Janie's effervescent

excitement over her discovery of her womanhood and the unlimited potential of life and she tries to force Janie to give it up.

> Nanny closed her eyes and nodded a slow, weary affirmation many times before she gave it voice.
>
> "Yeah, Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away." (12)

Nanny's insistence that Janie shed her youthful idealism is an important element in the Bildungsroman in that it forces the character to evaluate what she believes, and to confront any disillusionment about what her life is, or could be, in reality.

The theme of disillusionment and the potential for growth that is borne of it is popular in literature. I find it useful to recall John Keats' metaphor for disillusionment and growth as Buckley summarizes it:

> The child, he wrote, lingers in 'the infant or thoughtless Chamber' as long as he remains content with simple sensations and impressions. All too soon, however, the assertion of the thinking principle drives him into the second room, 'the Chamber of Maiden Thought,' where before long his new-found delight in ideas, the joyous liberty of speculation, is shadowed by his perception of the world's misery and pain, and awareness which gradually darkens the bright chamber and at the same time opens new doors. (Buckley 2)

I would argue that Janie's grandmother pushes Janie into something similar to Keaton's "Chamber of Maiden Thought" and thus causes a permanent emotional rift between them. Janie's view of what she wants her life to be does not meet that of her grandmother. Janie can no longer trust that her grandmother was truly looking out for her best interests, for if she were, she would not force Janie into a loveless, meaningless marriage for the sake of security.

The essential conflict between Janie and her grandmother stems from the fact that Janie's grandmother comes from an era, that of slavery, in which African- American women were victimized not only by the white slave owners who raped them, but also by the white mistresses who blamed them for the rape and also for their own culturally repressed sexuality. In her book Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Woman's Autobiography, Johnnie M. Stover states that

> The woman-to-woman relationship between the nineteenth-century African American woman slave/indentured servant and the nineteenth-century European American mistress is characterized by the mistress's bouts of jealousy and attempts to minimize the black woman.... The typical nineteenth-century mistress, especially but not exclusively the mistress of the Southern plantation, oftentimes victimized the sexually abused woman/girl slave/ servant in an effort to relieve her own sense of victimization under the constraints of the "cult of true womanhood," a concept that left her socially, politically, and sexually frustrated in a white-male-dominated society. (40)

African American women of the time were not only abused by the white men who raped them but also by the white women who were themselves victims of powerlessness in a society that allowed their husbands impunity for their irresponsible and destructive behavior[3].

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[3] In her book Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist, Hazel Carby explains the dominating theory of the time that allowed white males to go unpunished for the rape of female slaves: "Overt sexuality [...] emerged in images of the black woman, where 'charm' revealed its relation to the dark forces of evil and magic. The effect of black female sexuality on the white male was represented in an entirely different form from that of the figurative power of white female sexuality. [...] The white male, in fact, was represented as being merely prey to the rampant sexuality of his female slaves. The white female [was obligated] to 'civilize' the baser instincts of man. But in the face of what was constructed as the overt sexuality of the black female, [...] these baser male instincts were entirely uncontrolled. Thus, the white slave master was not regarded as being responsible for his actions toward the black female slaves. On the contrary, it was the female slave who was held responsible for being a potential, and direct, threat to the conjugal sanctity of the white mistress. (27)

The only experience that Nanny has in regard to female sexuality is her rape, for which she was blamed, and her resultant daughter. In Nanny's retelling of the story about when the mistress comes to see Nanny's baby, she says:

> "You betta git dat kivver offa dat youngun and dat quick!"..."Look lak you don't know who is Mistis on dis plantation, Madam. But Ah aims to show you."...Nigger, whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair?" She begin tuh slap my jaws ever which a'way. ... Ah had too many feelins tuh tell which one tuh follow so Ah didn't cry and Ah didn't do nothin' else. [Then the mistress said,] "Ah wouldn't dirty mah hands on yuh. But first thing in de mornin' de overseer will take you to de whippin' post and tie you down on yo' knees and cut de hide offa yo' yaller back." (17-18)

Understandably, with this history of physical and emotional abuse Nanny has a skewed perception of what human sexuality can and should be – a healthy, natural part of life. Nanny's desire for Janie to escape the fate of victimization is reasonable, given her own personal history, but not realistic for Janie. This differentiation is important because it emphasizes the fact that Hurston is consciously moving away from the slave narrative, trying to forge a new sexual identity for African American women, one that frees them from the history of violence that they have experienced.

Janie struggles to find and embrace this identity throughout the novel. Bloom illuminates Janie's essential motivation by saying," Janie's perpetual sense of the possibilities of another day propels her from Nanny's vision of safety first to the catastrophe of Joe Starks and then to the love of Tea Cake, her true husband" (3). In other words, in Janie's struggle for more than just security she makes some errors in judgment, but ultimately, through perseverance and idealism, she overcomes the future that her grandmother sets for her and finds satisfaction.

Janie, as we see in the conflict with her grandmother, does not completely fit into the characterization of the traditional Bildungsroman, which Marianne Hirsch describes as follows: "the protagonist is an essentially passive character, a plaything of circumstance. Unable to control his destiny actively, he is someone who gives shape to events without actually causing them" (297). We find that this definition is definitely not true of Janie, who does everything she can to control her destiny.

It is after her second husband Joe's death that Janie comes to realize how her grandmother's attitudes have affected her own misguided decisions. Janie discovers that Nanny's fears and well-intentioned misguidance have caused Janie to lose precious time in her search for her ideals.

> Digging around inside of herself [...] she found that she had no interest in [Nanny] at all. She hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity [...] Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon – for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you – and pinched it into such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. (89)

Janie has an important revelation in that she now recognizes that she cannot accept someone else's view of possibility as her own and that her own horizon is much more exciting and inviting than the frightening one that her grandmother knew and feared.

What makes this Bildungsroman step, the conflict of generations, different in Hurston's story is that while there is sadness and sorrow for the character, which Geta LeSeur defines as an element of the African American Bildungsroman (3), there is in turn almost an instantaneous affirmation of life in Janie's turning-point decision to leave the

marriage with Logan Killicks to go off with Joe Starks in search of her happiness. When she finally makes the choice to leave Logan,

> A feeling of sudden newness and change came over her. [...] Even if Joe was not there waiting for her, the change was bound to do her good. [...] The morning air was like a new dress. [...] From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. (32)

We soon discover that Joe is not the bee that Janie is looking for, nor does her marriage to him culminate in her pear tree ideal. He does serve a significant purpose in this version of the Bildungsroman genre, however. Joe represents the move from provinciality. He is going to take her away from the sixty acres, the mule, and the loveless marriage. Joe, as will become clear, is also another catalyst for Janie's self-education and ultimate self-actualization.

At this point in the story, when Janie reaches the larger society of Eatonville, her sense of not-belonging takes its greatest toll on her. As Joe's wife, her inability to relate to the community keeps her from using them as her support against his oppressive behavior. Janie's relationship with her husband, devoid of open communication and honesty, further inhibits her ability to connect to herself, Joe, and the community. After the mule that Joe buys from Matt Bonner dies, Janie wants to attend the "funeral" with Joe. He tells her that as the mayor's wife it is not fitting for her to be at such a "draggin' out" (60). Joe leaves her in charge of the store and "After more shouting of advice and orders and useless comments, the town escorted the carcass off. No, the carcass moved off with the town, and left Janie standing in the doorway" (60). Janie can not reach out to the community and they can not reach out to her because Joe stands in the way.

In addition to this example there are numerous tactics that Joe employs with Janie that keep her from being a part of the community. She is not allowed to speak at town functions; he forces her to wear a head rag to hide her enviable hair; he pushes her into working in the store which keeps her "above" the other townsfolk; and finally, she is not allowed to participate in a community-fostering event in the simple form of playing a game of checkers. (54) All of these things contribute to Janie's inability to become a part of the community that she desperately needs to develop fully as a person.

The people of the community do not know about Janie's silent struggle to belong. Two men on the porch discuss Joe and Janie's relationship; what they say gives the outsider's perspective on the relationship:

> "Ah often wonder how dat lil wife uh hisn makes out wid him, 'cause he's uh man dat changes everything but nothin' don't change him."
>
> "You know many's de time Ah done thought about dat mahself. He gits on her ever now and then when she make little mistakes round de store."
>
> "Whut make her keep her head tied up lak some ole 'oman round de store? Nobody couldn't *git* me tuh tie no rag on mah head if Ah had hair lak dat."
>
> "Maybe he make her do it. Maybe he skeered some de rest of us mens might touch it round dat store. It sho is uh hidden mystery to me."
>
> "She sho don't talk much. De way he rears and pitches in de store sometimes when she make uh mistake is sort of ungodly, but she don't seem to mind at all. Reckon dey understand one 'nother." (49-50)

What they fail to realize is that Janie and Joe do not understand each other at all. Janie's seeming indifference to Joe's public humiliation of her is the only way that Janie has of dealing with the desire of the community not to interfere in this high-profile marriage. The people of the community do not live up to their obligation to Janie. She needs their support and inclusion in their lives. They are her only link to the world outside herself.

Without their involvement, for good or for ill, she is living in a vacuum. They are unable to give her the connection she needs because their misinterpretation of Joe and Janie's relationship and Joe's active resistance to allowing her to mingle in their lives makes them all believe that their intervention is not wanted or necessary.

Janie reaches the next crisis in her story early in their marriage when she sees that Joe's position in the community and his own blindness where she is concerned are going to cause problems. She and Joe are talking one night and he asks her:

> "Well, honey, how yuh lak bein' Mrs. Mayor?"
>
> It's all right Ah reckon, but don't yuh think it keeps us in uh kinda strain?"
>
> "Strain? You mean cookin' and waitin' on folks?"
>
> "Naw, Jody, it jus' looks lak it keeps us in some way we ain't natural wid one 'nother. You'se always off talkin' and fixin' things, and Ah feels lak Ah'm jus' markin' time. Hope it soon gits over."
>
> "Over, Janie? I god, Ah ain't even started good. Ah told you in de very first beginnin' dat Ah aimed tuh be uh big voice. You oughta be glad, 'cause dat makes uh big woman outa you."
>
> A feeling of coldness and fear took hold of her. She felt far away from things and lonely. (46)

The fact that Joe believes that his success equals Janie's belies his indifference to her sense of self apart from him. For years, she suffers in silence under his demands and his demeaning behavior inspired by his own insecurities. This portion of her life is equivalent in the Bildungsroman model to what Hirsch describes as "The process of maturity [which] is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order" (298). Jody, as Janie calls him, is the representative of the

unbending social order. He imposes strictures on Janie that she has no desire to live up to. When he has the grand opening of the store,

> Jody told her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening. Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow and the other women were the gang. So she put on one of her bought dresses and went up the new-cut road all dressed in wine-colored red. (41)

She never desires social status as a person set apart from the rest of the townspeople, as if she were a statuette for the mayor's porch. As Janie explains to Pheoby after Joe's death:

> Jody classed me off. Ah didn't. … Ah always did want tuh git round uh whole heap, but Jody wouldn't 'low me tuh. When Ah wasn't in de story he wanted me tuh jes sit wid folded hands and sit dere. And Ah'd sit dere wid de walls creepin' up on me and squeezin' all de life outa me. (112)

Since this is what Joe expects of her, it was what the town came to expect of her as well and it feels like suffocation. Janie would rather be part of the community, not the envy of it. Joe is not willing to see this about Janie; in fact, he is indignant at her seeming ingratitude – "Here he was just pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and overlook the world and she here pouting over it! " (62). All Janie has is the outside of things and this is apparent in her attitude in crucial turning points in her life narrative, after she leaves Logan physically and Joe emotionally.

Braendlin describes the psychology of the heroine at this point in a Bildungsroman: "Entrapped by domesticity, forced by the demands of her nurturing role to efface her desire for autonomy, the contemporary *Bildungsroman* heroine struggles to reassess and redefine her life and herself as an individual" (78). Janie chooses to redefine herself and as a result, she can no longer allow herself to acquiesce to Joe's

demands. She will not permit him to manipulate the part of her that she has claimed for herself. He cannot hurt her emotionally anymore. She disconnects herself from him in such a way that she can now continue to search for what is going to fulfill her.

Ultimately she sees the purpose of her marriage to Mayor Starks as a means to help her grow into the woman who will succeed in finding her dream. After they have an argument in which he beats her "until she had a ringing sound in her ears" (72) she realizes that Joe is not the man she had made herself believe him to be.

> Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. (72)

Barbara Johnson, in her essay "Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God, makes an astute observation about this tremendous shift in Janie's perspective:

> Just after the slap, Janie is standing, thinking, until something "fell off the shelf inside her." Janie's "inside" is here represented as a store that she then goes in to inspect. [...] [H]ere we find an internalization of the outer: Janie's inner self resembles a store. The material for this metaphor is drawn from the narrative world of contiguity: the store is the place where Joe has set himself up as lord, master and proprietor. But here Jody's image is broken, and reveals itself never to have been metaphor but only a metonym of Janie's dream: "looking at it she saw that it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over." (165)

For a long time, Janie allows her dreams to be packaged on a shelf in Jody's store. When she finally realizes that Jody wasn't the man she made herself believe him to be –

someone who wanted for her what she wanted for herself – she was able to take her dreams off his shelf and set up her own store.

We then see Janie return again to the image of the pear tree that she has been clinging to, if only in the deepest recesses of her psyche:

> She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. (72)

Janie now realizes that Joe was never the man who was going to help her realize her ideal of a relationship that would help her fulfill her dream of symbiotic existence with another human being, symbolized in the recurring image of the pear tree.

> She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. She bathed and put on a fresh dress and head kerchief and went to the store before Jody had time to send for her. That was a vow to the outside of things. (72)

Washing herself and putting on fresh clothing is indicative of Janie's important shift in her attitude toward Joe and the state of her marriage. She is no longer going to leave herself vulnerable to Joe's destructive effect on her dreams. He is now completely cut off from the intimacy that she offered to him in the form of her dreams. She recognizes that he does not value them and she is prepared to wait for someone who will.

Braendlin points out that we should "recognize a dual process of female Bildung: first, the adolescent development journey, depicting the traditional tension [...] between personal ideals and social reality, and second, the crisis situation of the mature woman as

she comes to realize that the conventional goal of marriage is a "self-less" prison. (78) Janie has now freed herself from this paradigm and is able to begin to resolve the conflict between personal ideals and social reality.

Janie's ability to finally stand up to Joe is how she discovers her own strength, which leads to the most important part of her journey.

> "Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's a whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life." (79)

As a result of this retort to Joe, Janie forces Joe into realizing that his physical self is vastly different from the image he holds in his head. Not only does he realize that Janie has no respect for him, but now he knows that the townspeople recognize his vulnerability:

> Then Joe Starks realized all the meanings and his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David. But Janie had done worse, she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed, would keep on laughing. (79-80)

Janie, with the community, makes an assessment of Joe's life and accoutrements and Joe comes to realize that everything that he has worked for and the respect that he has demanded have become useless in his bid for immortality and true esteem. He has not treated Janie as he should have and finally the community backs Janie up, through their complicit laughter. The power shifts from Joe to Janie; she now holds the community's sympathy and esteem, though she is still searching for her niche in it.

After Joe's death Janie ruminates on her life and considers what to do next. It is then that she makes an important discovery about herself:

> Years ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she had remembered. Perhaps she'd better look. She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place. (87)

She goes on to let her hair down, which is something that Joe never allows her to do because he knows that it was her treasure – it makes her feel feminine and it also makes other men desire her. Joe's insecurities in his own manhood do not allow Janie to discover her womanhood until after he is gone.

This metaphor of letting her hair down is useful because it manifests Janie's newfound psychological and physical independence. It also harkens back to a time in Janie's life when her imagination and future were unfettered. Janie has left behind the naiveté of her youth, but still reaches for the attainable idealism that has propelled her to this point. Buckley says in Seasons of Youth:

> The deepest strength stems from flashes of sudden insight, 'spots of time,' scattered throughout existence but most frequent and compelling in unself-conscious childhood, moments when the soul, lost to immediate selfish concern, catches a brief intimation of some ultimate pattern, a perdurable grandeur in the natural world or an elemental dignity in the human gesture. [...] the 'spots of time' acquire a religious significance; each is a true 'epiphany,' a warranty of the soul's belonging to a larger life. (4)

Janie has finally reached the point where she is beholden to no one but herself and this allows her the freedom to cast off society's expectations and look for her own, the ones that she left behind in childhood.

The community still plays a significant role in Janie's life after Joe's death, though it does not affect her as it once did. They all think they know Janie will to want to marry again and probably sooner rather than later. This assumption of theirs, that Janie will inevitably remarry, is reminiscent of the narrative that Nanny had planned for Janie. The marriage of an eligible, beautiful young woman is taken for granted as the only feasible action available to her. For Janie, the freedom that she has found for the first time in her life is too precious to be relinquished so quickly and only to satisfy the sensibilities of the townsfolk. She and her friend Pheoby are talking one evening and Janie tries to explain to her why she is in no rush to be married:

> "Tain't dat Ah worries over Joe's death, Pheoby, Ah jus' loves dis freedom."
>
> "Sh-sh-sh! Don't let nobody hear you say dat, Janie. Folks will say you ain't sorry he's gone."
>
> "Let 'em say whut dey wants tuh, Pheoby. To my thinkin' mourning oughtn't tuh last no longer'n grief." (93)

For Janie, the community that has observed her marriage to Joe represents the social mores that govern the lives of its constituents. Robert Hemenway observes in his chapter "Crayon Enlargements of Life" that

> When Hurston writes of Eatonville, the store porch is all important. It is the center of the community, the totem representing black cultural tradition; it is where the values of the group are manifested in verbal behavior. The store porch, in Zora's language, is "the center of the world." To describe the porch's activities she often uses the phrase "crayon enlargements of life." [...] The store porch is where "big picture talkers" use "a side of the world for a canvas" as they create a portrait of communal values. (239)

When someone violates or alters those expectations, the community will be quick to condemn, but they are not always right. Janie is aware of the mercurial nature of people's good will to such a degree that she knows she must observe meaningless rituals when necessary. The townsfolk know that Joe was not a good husband to Janie, yet they insist on the socially sanctioned rituals of mourning and respect for the dead. Part of a Bildungsroman story is the search for individuality – of a person trying to reconcile the duty of finding her own values, and merging these values with the greater, sometimes hostile, social circle. This is one such moment in Janie's development.

Though the community would not be able to understand Janie's unwillingness to be remarried right away, they are even more unreceptive to her ultimate choice of husband. Janie falls in love with Tea Cake because he does not care what the "rules" are. The first indication we get of this is when Janie first meets him and he teaches her to play checkers. She is hesitant to do it because Joe always told her that it was "too heavy" for her brains (96). Not only does Tea Cake think that she is perfectly capable of playing well, but he also tells her that she has got "good meat on yo' head" (96). His natural acceptance and encouragement of her playing allows the townsfolk to start to see Janie in a different light: "Everybody was surprised at Janie playing checkers but they liked it. Three or four stood behind her and coached her moves and generally made merry with her in a restrained way" (101). It is as if they are given permission to see that Janie can hold a different place in the community from the one they are used to. It takes an outsider, Tea Cake, to help them adjust their expectations and perceptions of reality.

Perhaps the most revealing example of how Tea Cake helps Janie shed the restrictions that have been placed on her by others is when he takes Janie for a midnight fishing trip:

> It was so crazy digging worms by lamp light and setting out for Lake Sabelia after midnight that she felt like a child breaking rules. That's what made Janie like it. They caught two or three and got home just before day. Then she had to smuggle Tea Cake out by the back gate and that made it seem like some great secret that she was keeping from the town. (102)

Tea Cake, in one action, has brought Janie back to the idealism of her childhood. She feels the giddy excitement of life. It is significant, though, that she feels like she has to hide it from the town. It means that she has also absorbed the awareness of what her actions look like to outsiders. When she talks to Hezekiah, her helper at the store, the next day he tries to "warn her about Tea Cake: "'Dat long-legged Tea Cake ain't got doodly squat. He ain't got no business makin' hissef familiar wid nobody lak you. Ah said Ah wuz goin' to tell yuh so yuh could know'" (103). There are two important implications in Hezekiah's speech: first, he takes it upon himself to tell Janie who it is appropriate for her to be with and second, he is assuming that she is not aware of this responsibility – she has to be told by him that Tea Cake is not right for her. Significantly, she does not let this awareness of disapproval stop her from resisting a community imposition in what becomes one of her most important decisions, and striving to trust her own judgment.

It becomes obvious that Tea Cake wants to know Janie and to encourage her to know herself when he comes to see her one night. Janie is wary of letting Tea Cake into her heart, for fear that he will not love her in return. She tries to deflect his compliments

to her with outer indifference and he can see that she is trying to keep him out. He starts to perceive that Janie is not taking him seriously and Janie replies, misunderstanding him:

> "Ah ain't got no business bein' mad at nothin' you do and say. You got it all wrong. Ah ain't mad atall."
>
> Ah know it and dat's what puts de shamery on me. You'se jus' disgusted wid me. Yo' face jus' left here and went off somewhere else. Naw, you ain't mad wid me. Ah be glad if you was, 'cause then Ah might do somethin' tuh please yuh." (104)

We can see here how differently Tea Cake views Janie from the way that Joe did. He does not want to beat her into submission – he knows he cannot. He wants her to love him from the inside out. For the first time, Janie has met someone who can see that she has separated her inside and outside selves. When he says "Yo' face jus' left here," he can see through her façade to her true feelings, and he wants to do something that will please her. Someone wants to please her for the first time in her life.

Finally, Janie meets the person for whom she had been saving her innermost thoughts and feelings. Significantly, her adolescent dreams rush back in full force at the thought and sight of him. He doesn't just speak to her ideal, he is her ideal:

> He could be a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God. (106)

What makes this relationship copasetic is not only that her relationship with Tea Cake is an affirmation of the validity of her adolescent idealism, but also that it appears that Janie provides Tea Cake with the same sort of satisfaction. Janie needs assurance from him that he is there to stay and he says to her, "'Janie, Ah hope God may kill me, if Ah'm

lyin'. Nobody else on earth kin hold uh candle tuh you, baby. You got de keys to de kingdom'" (109). Janie finally has someone who sees her inner strength and beauty. Only after the unsatisfactory relationships with her first two husbands can she recognize and appreciate Tea Cake's appreciation of her. Harold Bloom points out that

> Hurston's most effective irony is that Janie's drive towards her own erotic potential should transcend her grandmother's categories, since the marriage with Tea Cake is also Janie's pragmatic liberation from bondage towards men. When he tells her, in all truth, that she has the keys to the kingdom, he frees her from living in her grandmother's way. (3)

Janie has found her freedom through a mutual, profound, and timeless commitment to another person. In their relationship, there is no sense of bondage or repression, which is what Nanny feared most for Janie; there is a love that Nanny never knew could exist between two people given the history of slavery and female subjugation that were the only things she ever knew.

Both Janie and Tea Cake realize that the community is not going to allow this relationship to develop within its ken. They are not wise enough to liberate Janie from the strictures they have imposed on her:

> It was after the picnic that the town began to notice things and got mad. Tea Cake and Mrs. Mayor Starks! All the men that she could get, and fooling with somebody like Tea Cake! Another thing, Joe Starks hadn't been dead but nine months and here she goes sashaying off to a picnic in pink linen. Done quit attending church, like she used to. [...] All those signs of possession. Tea Cake in a borrowed car teaching Janie to drive. Tea Cake and Janie playing checkers; playing coon-can; playing Florida flip on the store porch all afternoon as if nobody else was there. (110)

Janie is not living up to her role as the widow of Joe Starks. It is not proper for her to be doing (or not doing) these things with Tea Cake. They feel they have a right to help Janie

make the appropriate choice when it comes to taking a husband, and it is not going to be Tea Cake.

Janie does not need their help because she has reached one of the milestones of the Bildungsroman – self-education. Janie finally realizes why her life up to now has been so unsatisfying. Her grandmother's credo of safety had been confusing and confounding to Janie's natural inclination toward exploration and self-knowledge. Janie has been

> getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. But she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down a back road after <u>things</u>. It was all according to the way you see things. Some people could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. (89)

This passage reveals that Janie has gained the insight she needs to break away fully from her grandmother's well-intentioned but stifling view of the world with a "pinched horizon." As Hemenway eloquently states, "[T]his passage demonstrate[s] Janie's growing self-confidence in her own judgments and her realistic appraisal of her failed dreams. Only when thus prepared can she accept Tea Cake as an equal, without illusion, discovering love because she is finally accepted for herself" (75). The passage also re-emphasizes the importance of community in the ethnic Bildungsroman model. Janie's grandmother wants her to have the things that Nanny had never had – a nice home, property, respect. All of this comes at the cost of meaningful relationships and a larger worldview. Janie is supposed to sacrifice her inside self for the trappings that belong to the outside. As Janie says, she nearly drowns with the idea that there was more value in things than in people.

When Janie and Tea Cake marry, Janie is reconnected with the replenishing power of the personal relationships that she had been lacking in her marriages to Logan and Joe. At first Tea Cake does not want to include Janie in certain aspects of his life that he feels Janie would not approve of. After he sneaks off to gamble for a few days Janie chastises him soundly.

> "Looka heah, Tea Cake, if you ever go off from me and have a good time lak dat and then come back heah tellin' me how nice Ah is, Ah specks tuh kill yuh dead. You heah me?"
> "So you aims tuh partake wid everything, hunh?"
> "Yeah, Tea Cake, don't keer what it is." (124)

She has been searching her whole life for the vitality that Tea Cake promises with every word and gesture, and he is afraid to share it with her because he still thinks of her as part of the "muckty mucks" class (124). After she assures him that she is with him in anything, he says, "'Dat's all Ah wants tuh know. From now on you'se mah wife and mah woman and everything else in de world Ah needs'" (124). Tea Cake knows that he has her for his wife in the eyes of the law, but now he knows that Janie is with him in spirit too.

It is at this point that Janie begins the last phase of developing her philosophy for life. Tea Cake takes Janie into the Everglades which Tea Cake describes to Janie as being the place where, "Folks don't do nothin' [...] but make money and fun and foolishness. We must go dere" (128). After Tea Cake makes this pronouncement, "He drifted off into sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (128). Janie is finally able to release her ideal from the private place in which she kept it hidden. She could mix her inside and outside

now, the two worlds that were separated when she was with Joe. She is free to live without fear and with love, which is limitlessly liberating for her.

As fulfilling as their relationship is, when discussing Janie's relationship with Tea Cake, readers must contend with the incident in which Tea Cake beats Janie and the significance it has to their story:

> Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (147)

This event is problematic for many feminist critics of the novel. Shawn Miller, in his essay "'Some Other Way to Try'": From Defiance to Creative Submission in Their Eyes Were Watching God," claims that Janie's willingness to take a beating from Tea Cake demonstrates a submission to his patriarchal character that she refused to give to her first two husbands:

> Strangely, in her third marriage, Janie offers no resistance to Tea Cake's commands, which are often as patriarchal as those of Killicks and Starks; in fact, we usually see Janie in absolute submission to him. She wears what he wants her to wear, goes where he wants her to go, and accepts all manner of negative behavior from her new husband with a quiet passivity uncharacteristic of the Janie we have come to know. Janie's willingness to take a beating, for instance, makes Tea Cake the envy of the muck. (83)

Again, it seems that there is an "inside" and an "outside" to things. On the outside, which represents the eyes of the community, Janie's willingness to take a beating means that she has succumbed to the traditional role of a woman in a relationship. That this beautiful woman has supposedly chosen to be submissive to her man signifies that she knows her place and it gives the other men hope that they too may have the same luck. On the

inside – the personal relationship between Janie and Tea Cake that is not open to public scrutiny – this beating means no such thing, as I will explain later.

Deborah Clarke, on the other hand, in her essay "'The porch couldn't talk for looking': Voice and Vision in Their Eyes Were Watching God," attributes the beating less to the nature of Janie and Tea Cake's relationship and more to the implications of racial identity based on Janie's genetic background:

> Hurston's world is not solely visual; material bodies exist tactily as well as visually, and color is not always beautiful, as the historical forces of slavery and oppression can be read on Janie's body. She is the product of two generations of rape, one of them interracial. She suffers physically for her interracial body when Tea Cake beats her to display his ownership in the face of Mrs. Turner's theories of Janie's superiority due to her light skin. (609-610)

Again, I believe the Tea Cake's motive for beating Janie is not fully appreciated by this analysis. Mrs. Turner's attentions to Janie are a point of annoyance to Tea Cake, but I do not believe that they are what finally induce him to beat Janie.

While both of these readings offer unique insight into the situation, my own interpretation is that Hurston attempts to portray the irrational, but very fundamental nature of human jealousy. When analyzing the passage of Tea Cake beating Janie for possible anti-feminist sentiment, we must remember that Janie was the first of the two of them to initiate fighting. Earlier in the story we see her start a fight with Tea Cake over a girl in the fields that he had been flirting with:

> It wasn't long before Tea Cake found her [at home] and tried to talk. She cut him short with a blow and they fought from one room to the other, Janie trying to beat him, and Tea Cake kept holding her wrists and wherever he could to keep her from going too far.
>
> "Ah b'lieve you been messin' round her!" she panted furiously.

> "No sich uh thing!" Tea Cake retorted.
> "Ah b'lieve yuh did."
> "Don't keer how big uh lie get told, somebody kin b'lieve it."
> They fought on. "You done hurt mah heart, now you come wid uh lie tuh bruise mah ears! Turn go mah hands!" Janie seethed. But Tea Cake never let go. (137)

While the abuse of another person, particularly that by a physically stronger man perpetrated on a woman, is at all times inexcusable, through these physical altercations between Janie and Tea Cake, the reader is able to identify the real fears behind the aggression that we all feel at one point or another in our own relationships. For Tea Cake and Janie alike, the only way they could express their deep-seated fear of losing the other to romantic rivals, real or perceived, was through physical aggression. This is not an uncommon phenomenon in our culture. Though it is not the preferred mode of conflict resolution, it does happen and it gives the characters even more of an emotional presence in the reader's mind.

Janie finds that working with Tea Cake in the muck is very different from working with Joe in the store. Unlike Joe, Tea Cake does not want Janie there as an ornament, or even as an indistinct employee, but because he misses her company too much during the day if she is not there with him. This makes the work pleasurable for both Janie and Tea Cake because they get to share it with each other.

In the new community she meets in the muck, Janie also has the opportunity to belong to the group as she never had with Joe. She is no one in particular to them and so she can blend in and participate with no expectations from them. She and Tea Cake

blend in so successfully that they soon become the center of the community. Their home serves as the "porch" that was the front of Joe Starks' store.

> The house was full of people every night. That is, all around the doorstep was full. Some were there to hear Tea Cake pick the box; some came to talk and tell stories, but most of them came to get into whatever game was going on or might go on. [...] Outside of the two jooks, everything on that job went on around those two. (134)

The difference is that now, Janie is free to participate in every aspect of the action, if she so chooses. As Hurston says, "[H]ere, [Janie] could listen and laugh and even talk some herself if she wanted to. She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest" (134). She could express herself as the "born orator" (58) that she was declared to be back in Eatonville. Janie was learning from the community a kinship of language and consciousness. She could give and receive a collective affirmation of culture. This development contributes to her sense of self in the way that it allows her to connect to her community. She can now place herself within a group of people to recognize and value her contribution.

The language that Hurston uses to describe the muck is an affirmation of the vitality of the African American community. She describes people who work very hard during the day and live very hard at night.

> All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to bodies and biting the skin like ants. (131)

This is another instance in which Hurston celebrates the richness of a culture that many of her contemporaries belittled, despised or tried to ignore. By offering up the image of the "rich black earth" Hurston is able to connect the people in the most intimate way with nature and the natural order of things. There can be no greater sense of belonging and validity than to be of, and one with, the earth.

Not only does Hurston use this imagery in correlation to the people, but it also provides Janie with a sense of belonging that she has never experienced before. Janie is able to join a community with which she felt connected and she is also allowed to experience even more profound connection to her ancestral past. Hemenway discusses Hurston's connection of Caribbean and African culture: "She began to see links between Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean folklore. She had met so many West Indians in the Miama area that she was sure 'their folklore definitely influences ours in South Florida'" (127). Hurston again emphasizes the importance of folklore and its sub-category of music in Their Eyes Were Watching God through the "Saws," the Bahaman workers in the Everglades. After the picking is done for the season, Janie

> heard the subtle but compelling rhythms of the Bahaman drummers [and] she'd walk over and watch the dances. She did not laugh the "Saws" to scorn as she had heard the people doing in the season. She got to like it a lot and she and Tea Cake were on hand every night. (139)

Through the shared cultural heritage with Bahaman drummers, the people on the muck could relate to the value of the music. Through Janie and Tea Cake's friendship and persistence, they are able to draw the Bahamans into their circle of friends: "[The Saws]

quit hiding out to hold their dances when they found that their American friends did not laugh at them as they feared. Many of the Americans learned to jump and liked it as much as the Saws" (154). In this small passage, Hurston establishes the validity and value of the culture.

Janie's insight into her life and its progression from repressed to liberated becomes more tangible in the face of the hurricane that threatens their home. When Tea Cake comes to her, afraid that she is angry with him for putting her in such danger, she thoroughly and definitively puts an end to his fears:

> "We been tuhgether round two years. If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don't keer if you die at dusk. It's so many people never seen de light at all. Ah wuz fumblin' around and God opened de door."
>
> He dropped to the floor and put his head in her lap. "Well then, Janie, you meant whut you didn't say, 'cause Ah never knowed you wuz so satisfied wid me lak dat." (159-60)

While most people may think of death as the worst thing that can happen to a person, Janie realizes that the worst thing that can happen is never really "see[ing] de light at daybreak." Janie knows that many people have never had the well-earned epiphany that she has. Most people may not even be aware that they are not taking full advantage of their lives. They only grope about just to make it to the next day. Tea Cake knows that Janie pays him the dearest compliment when she tells him that the most important thing for her, before life, and particularly before death, is that she has found him and through her relationship with him, has discovered herself.

Tea Cake saves Janie's life in more than a spiritual way. One of his last gifts to her is to save her from a mad dog, and contracting rabies and dying from the bite that was

intended for Janie. Pearlie Mae Fisher Peters observes in her book, The Assertive Woman in Zora Neale Hurston's Fiction, Folklore, and Drama, that, "[f]or loving her, [Tea Cake] pays the ultimate price with his life, as does Janie in suffering the loss" (147). Janie loses Tea Cake slowly, which is perhaps the most painful experience for her. His descent into rabies-induced madness results in Tea Cake's mistrust of her love for him – the most agonizing trial she suffers. She realizes that the "big old dawg with the hatred in his eyes had killed her after all" (178) by taking Tea Cake away from her. She would rather her own life had been taken than for "Tea Cake, the son of the Evening Sun, [...] to die for loving her" (178).

This situation is Janie's "trial in love," one of the steps of the Bildungsroman. Hurston's unique approach to it is that this trial is a culmination of her journey thus far, not just a part of it. Tea Cake has been for Janie everything that she was looking for, from childhood on. He embodies every ideal that she has. To lose him is to risk losing all the progress she has made in her journey. Though this is not ultimately manifested, it seems like a real possibility to Janie at the time. However, even in Tea Cake's misery and jealousy they manage to exchange words of love and gratitude to one another:

> "Ah knows plenty mo' men would take yuh and work hard fuh de priviledge. Ah done heard 'em talk."
>
> "Maybe so, Tea Cake, Ah ain't never tried tuh find out. Ah jus' know dat God snatched me out de fire through you. And Ah luves yuh and feel glad."
>
> "Thank yuh, ma'am, but don't say you'se ole. You'se uh lil girl baby all de time. God made it so you spent yo' ole age
> first wid somebody else, and saved up yo' young girl days to spend wid me."
>
> "Ah feel dat uh way too, Tea Cake, and Ah thank yuh fuh sayin' it."

> "Tain't no trouble tuh say whut's already so. You'se uh pretty woman outside uh bein' nice."
>
> "Aw, Tea Cake."
>
> "Yeah, you is too. Everytime Ah see uh patch uh roses uh somethin' over sportin' they selves makin' out they pretty, Ah tell 'em 'Ah want yuh tuh see mah Janie sometime.' You must let de flowers see yuh sometimes, heah, Janie?" (181)

Tea Cake and Janie's tender and sincere praise of each other is present throughout their relationship but is perhaps most powerful here when it is apparent that Tea Cake will be gone soon and also in hindsight when we know of the violent face-off between them that is the result of his disease. These final words of love to each other allow Janie to focus not on Tea Cake's tragic ending, but on the beautiful life that they had together. Even when she realizes that her life may be in danger she takes every step to ensure that "she ought not to let poor sick Tea Cake do something that would run him crazy when he found out what he had done" (182). This statement underscores Janie's belief that Tea Cake will come back to her, out of this illness, and also that she cares more about what her death by his hand would do to him than that her life would be lost.

After Janie is forced to shoot Tea Cake when he tries to kill her, Janie is put on a very public trial. At this point we again see the powerfully negative possibilities that are inherent in a community. We also begin to see in one of the few racially significant parts of the novel, the implication of being not only a woman, but an African American woman, at the hands of a male, white jury. Barbara Johnson makes the point that African American women are, in many cases, denied either their womanhood or their ethnic heritage when they are grouped with either white women or African American men respectively. They are not allowed the totality of their being. She writes,

> What is constantly seen exclusively in terms of a binary opposition – black versus white, man versus woman – must be redrawn as a tetrapolar structure. What happens in the case of a black woman is that the four quadrants are constantly being collapsed into two. [...] This impossible position between two opposites is what I think Hurston intends when, at the end of the novel, she represents Janie as acquitted of the murder of Tea Cake by an all-white jury but condemned by her fellow blacks. This is not out of a "lack of bitterness toward whites" [...] but rather out of a knowledge of the standards of male dominance that pervade both the black and white worlds. (169)

This element of Hurston's own life, that of being an African American woman, is perhaps why she included this trial, considered by many critics to be problematic. She was often on similar trial in regard to her writing and her public life.

What Hurston emphasizes ultimately, however, is not the race or gender that is associated with this sensationalized trial but that the intimacy of Janie and Tea Cake's relationship is being impinged upon by the community. Janie's worst fear of being misunderstood in her love for Tea Cake is being realized in the community that once embraced both of them.

> Then she saw all of the colored people standing up in the back of the courtroom. Packed tight like a case of celery, only much darker than that. They were all against her, she could see. So many were there against her that a light slap from each one of them would have beat her to death. She felt them pelting her with dirty thoughts. They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. (186)

The same community that brings Janie a feeling of finally belonging and of being accepted is the one that was ready to condemn her for having the courage to live her life "in loving service" (184) to another human being. For Janie, a verdict of guilty would be devastating not because it would mean death, but, rather, it would indicate a fundamental

misunderstanding of her most dearly held beliefs: the belief in a selfless love and, not mutually exclusively, self-revelation as a life goal.

While Tea Cake's death does seem like a threat to Janie's new-found contentment, it serves the purpose of showing Janie that she is still her own person who can not only survive and function, but thrive on her own. As she explains to Pheoby at the end of the novel, "Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (191). Janie, throughout her relationships with the people closest to her, seems, by the novel's end, to have incorporated the best things from each of them, most importantly Tea Cake, to evolve into a self-assured, self-loving woman.

Janie also gives back to the community to which she has finally learned to belong in that she brings to them the wisdom she has gained through her experiences, underscoring the importance of the community in the African American Bildungsroman. Pheoby tells Janie, "'Lawd! [...] 'Ah done growed ten feet higher jus' listenin' tuh you, Janie. Ah ain't satisfied wid mahself no mo'. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin' wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin'" (192). Pheoby, as a representative of the community, gives Janie not only her approval, but her promise of protection. Listening to Janie's story has, by her own admission, allowed her to grow emotionally. It causes her to reevaluate her own life and her sense of satisfaction with it. Janie makes a meaningful connection to a larger identity and as such can rest assured in her own.

Hurston then ends the novel with what is arguably one of the most satisfying passages in American literature. She paints a picture of a solitary, but satisfied Janie relishing her complete but unceasing journey to self-awareness and acceptance:

> Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (193)

Janie has claimed her life and her story for herself. Everything the world has to offer is there for the taking. She has been brave enough to navigate and then relate her journey to its "conclusion" to the edification of others and now she has nothing to do but savor her success. By the end of Janie's narrative, we can see how significantly she revises the nature of Nanny's horizon from something that is limiting and feared into an affirmation of life and all its possibilities. Janie claims the world for herself; she ultimately does not need anyone else in her life to recognize the satisfaction that she has discovered.

Glynis Carr, in her essay "Storytelling as Bildung in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, asserts that "feminist theories of the relation between self-identity and self-liberation stress women's need to recover their 'lost' and devalued voices, to see the world from their own point of view and to speak honestly of their vision" (192). In Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston creates a female character that is a reflection of her belief that a woman can be considered independently of her ethnicity and gender, but also be allowed to be profoundly connected to each. For Janie, her ability to tell her story, importantly to another woman of her own ethnicity, allows her not only to recover her voice, but to liberate it, and also liberate that of the listener. Because the context in which the story is told – all African American, all southern Florida

– is insular, the story takes on a universal cast. There are no competing ideologies; the story is allowed to exist on its own terms and this allows the reader to get inside the ethos of the community and adopt it as his or her own. Janie, as an independent woman, is able to impart her hard-earned knowledge to another woman – Pheoby – who is excited to hear the possibilities available to her.

Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934): Hurston's Ambivalence Concerning the Male Bildungsroman

While Hurston is perhaps best known for her heroine Janie and other female protagonists in her short stories, she wrote many of her pieces with a male as the hero. These include Moses in Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939), John Pearson in Jonah's Gourd Vine (1934), and John Redding in her early short story "John Redding Goes to Sea." (1921)

In many of these pieces, she created characters who are not always successful in their struggles to find their place. A clear example of this theme is in "John Redding Goes to Sea." In it, her hero John Redding is a gentle, solicitous, and adventuresome young man who wishes to see the world before he settles into marriage and a family. As a young child he often dreams of meeting and embracing the horizon – an ever-present theme in Hurston's work. He sails twigs down the river that leads to the sea with his fervent dreams of eventually following them.

Hurston gives us a preview of John's fate when she says, "The twigs, which John called his ships, did not always sail away. Sometimes they would be swept in among the

weeds growing in the shallow water, and be held there" (926-27). We also hear an echo of Hurston's words at the beginning of Their Eyes Were Watching God, concerning the nature of the difference between men's and women's dreams, when John's father tries to explain to him why he should not be upset about his ships being stymied in their journey. "Well, well, doan cry. Ah thought youse uh grown up man. Men doan cry lak babies. You mustn't take it too hard 'bout yo' ships. You gotta git uster things gittin' tied up" (926). Men, in their own view in Hurston's world, are expected to give up their dreams when they do not look like they will become reality. John refuses to give up his dream of travel though both his mother, and when he gets older, his wife, insist upon it. Tragically, John dies in an accident on the river just as he is about to embark on his journey. The last image in the story is that of his battered body floating down the river to the open ocean with his now-useless freedom.

We see a continuation of the theme of a male protagonist being thwarted in his effort to achieve self-actualization in the story of John Pearson in Hurston's first novel, Jonah's Gourd Vine. Here is another example of a man who also ultimately has to look away in resignation from his dreams. In this case however, the inability of the hero to achieve his goals is more a result of a fatal flaw in his character than external circumstances such as those leading to John Redding's tragic fate.

Jonah's Gourd Vine is a thinly veiled recreation of Hurston's own family, and as such underpins the presence of autobiography within an author's work and its importance to the Bildungsroman genre. This is not to say that the novel is an autobiography, but it is autobiographical. As Buckley says in Seasons of Youth, "Fact and fiction are

inextricably mingled [...] the involvement of the personal emotions of the novelist can impair the integrity of a novel. But it can also, if properly controlled, lend a peculiar vibrancy to character" (24). Hurston shapes John as an appealing and empathetic character. She fills him with vibrancy – his strong physicality, his talent for public speaking, and his real desire (frustrated by his impulsive nature) to do what is right contribute to the reader's empathy for a character who nevertheless behaves in irresponsible and selfish ways. The purpose of writing a character who, with all his unique and desirable attributes, should be able to overcome his weaknesses like other Bildungsroman characters and find his place in society, but fails to do so, is that it allows for human tragedy. We all plead with John, in our hearts, to change his ways, but like many of us he has fundamental flaws over which he ultimately has no control. This allows a profound sympathy with a character who would otherwise only command our disdain.

One of the dangers of writing in an autobiographical style, of course, is that the aesthetic of the story may suffer from the reality-based premise. The reader can see Hurston's personal investment in the character of John, who is based on the story of her own father. Gordon Thomas goes so far as to posit that "it becomes difficult to determine whether certain motifs found in Hurston's fictions were patterned after her own experiences or after those of her father" (754). It is interesting to note that Hurston herself is only minimally represented in the pseudo-biography she creates for her father. She chooses, instead, to focus on illuminating John's psychology in his own right without regard to the toll it took on her personally. In Hurston's own life, the behavior of her

father affected her personal journey tremendously. In his decision to marry the woman on whom "Hattie" is based, he essentially thrust Hurston out of the house. Hurston's relationship with her stepmother was tempestuous and violent and as a result moved her farther away from her father. In Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston gives a glimpse of her relationship with her stepmother and its resultant effect on her relationship with her father. Hattie

> called me a sassy, impudent heifer, announced that she was going to take me down a buttonhole lower, and threw a bottle at my head. The bottle came sailing slowly through the air and missed me easily. She never should have missed. (101)

She goes on to describe a vicious fight between the two of them that Hurston portrays herself as winning. Hurston essentially eliminates herself from the narrative in Jonah's Gourd Vine in that the children are little described, but she manages to demonize Hattie, as the woman who came between her mother and father, to the same degree that she probably did in life, if her autobiography is a measure.

Hurston was abandoned by her father both emotionally and physically. In her autobiography she recounts the day at boarding school she found out her father did not want her to come home anymore:

> I kept looking out of the window so that I could see Papa when he came up the walk to the office. But nobody came for me. Weeks passed, and then a letter came. Papa said that the school could adopt me. (109)

Her father, John, is equally impotent at taking control of his life and at having control over the choices he makes as the John of the novel. Both allow their lives to be dictated by the poor control of impulses, with devastating results.

John Pearson's Bildungsroman develops along the lines of the standard generic model would, but unlike those that end with the character finding a working philosophy, defined by Buckley as the ultimate goal of the Bildungsroman, and a place in the community, John does not accomplish these goals. Hurston allows John, and therefore her own father, to struggle with his demons and to lose to them. This failure is useful because it allows the character to be imperfect and the reader to consider that not every character will find a way to reconcile his personality to his role in the community. It also creates an interesting opportunity to examine the role that gender plays in the story, which is so intimately linked to Hurston's perception of her father's strengths and weaknesses.

It is also significant that Hurston, as an African American woman, has allowed a happy ending for her female character (in Their Eyes Were Watching God) but has denied it to her male protagonist. Gordon E. Thompson, in his essay, "Projecting Gender: Personification in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston," posits that Hurston may be projecting her frustration at being a woman who was not allowed, by traditional standards, to be the story teller that men could be:

> We need take only one example to acknowledge Hurston's struggle with presenting herself, and therefore women, as storytellers. In her earliest published piece, for instance, in order to camouflage her private (female) concerns with telling tall tales and travel, Hurston purposely uses a male rather than a female character to dramatize these concerns and their interrelatedness in Hurston's universe. (749)

Thompson goes on to describe the likenesses between the imaginative life of Hurston as a young girl and that of the John Redding in her short story as well as the restrictions that

were placed on this imagination by their families. The difference is that as a male, John Redding is admired by his father for his imagination, which Thompson interprets as "fulfill[ing] an emotional need Hurston's father only occasionally fulfilled for her" (749). The fact that this male character comes to a tragic end may signify the displaced aggression that Hurston feels toward the societal restrictions on a female that prohibit for her the same kind of freedom afforded to men in storytelling.

In her autobiography, however, Hurston appears objective in her evaluation of her experiences in all areas of her life and seems neither resentful nor righteous:

> I do not say that my conclusions about anything are true for the Universe, but I have lived in many ways, sweet and bitter, and they feel right for me. I have seen and heard. I have sat in judgment upon the ways of others, and in the voiceless quiet of the night I have also called myself to judgment. [...] Like all mortals, I have been shaped by the chisel in the hand of Chance, bulged out here by a sense of victory, shrunken there by the press of failure and the knowledge of unworthiness. But it has been given to me to strive with life, and to conquer the fear of death. [...] Already I have touched the four corners of the horizon, for from hard searching it seems to me that tears and laughter, love and hate, make up the sum of life. (DTOAR 347-48)

Though Hurston may have had to overcome the traditional expectations assigned to male/female roles, she seems, in these words, to convey the sense that she will allow herself a "happy ending." She has been able to acknowledge that life offers the good and the bad and that one must make of it what one can.

Hurston challenges the traditional notion of men being the only story-tellers by taking the privilege of storytelling and using it to make a statement about the gender-neutral possibilities behind it. By appropriating a male voice in some of her stories and particularly in Jonah's Gourd Vine, perhaps Hurston is attempting to eliminate the need

to categorize narratives into male and female. Thompson quotes Fox-Genovese as saying, "Once the gaps between sexuality and gender begin to appear, men and women can begin to question whether gender flows naturally from sexuality, whether social demands on the individual are biologically determined....Neither masculinity nor femininity exists as an absolute" (Fox-Genovese, quoted in Thompson 755) Hurston, through her storytelling, proves that she can understand and convey the intricacies of any person's struggle for autonomy and meaning, whether male or female.

John's story is similar to Janie's in some fundamental aspects but perhaps more closely abides by the structure of a typical Bildungsroman. Like Janie, he grows up in a home that does not include his biological father. He is being raised by his mother and her surly, often abusive husband, Ned. John is finally forced to leave because his step-father's aggression and jealousy of him can only end in extreme violence. His step-father, like Janie's Nanny, cannot understand the desire to break away from the family and community that they live in. This desire is met with rebuke and misunderstanding, thus making it easier for the protagonist to leave. When John suggests that the whole family should leave their home and "cross de creek" to look for a better life, his mother tells him,

> Ned, he too hard-headed tuh do that. Ah done tried and tried but his back don't bend. De only difference 'tween him and uh mule is, de mule got four good foots, and he ain't got nairn. De minute anybody mention crossin' dat creek, he's good tuh make disturbiment and tear up peace. He been over dat creek all his life jus' ez barefooted ez uh yard dawg and know he ain't even got uh rooster tuh crow fuh day, yet and still you can't git 'im 'way from dere. (37)

This conflict between John and his step-father allows John to break away from his family and their values to find his own sense of what he wants his life to be.

In the second phase of the Bildungsroman journey, John is finally able to leave home after a number of confrontations with his step-father. When John comes back from "across de creek" to help with the family share-cropping harvest, he decides that he can no longer take Ned's abusive behavior. Ned, who is constantly looking for a way to berate or belittle John, threatens to punish him with a whipping:

> [...] Ned snatched off the trace-chain from the plow and turned upon John who was still twenty feet or more from his step-father. When Ned whirled about with the doubled trace-chain in his right fist he found not a cowering bulk of a boy but a defiant man, feet spread wide, a large rock drawn back to hurl. (43)

After Ned leaves with the threat to come back with a gun, John waits until he knows that Ned will not return and says to himself:

> "Shucks! Ahm goin' 'way from heah." It came to John like a revelation. Distance was escape. He stopped before the burnt-off trunk of a tree that stood eight or ten feet high and threw the character of Ned Crittenden upon it. (43)

John goes on to tell this effigy,

> "Tuh keep from killin' uh sorry something' like yuh, Ahm goin' way from heah [...] and when you see me agin Ahm gointer be somebody." [...] John stepped back a few paces, balanced his rock, hurled it against the stump with all his might and started across the field to the creek. (43-44)

In this passage, John makes important decisions in his actions and words. He has mentally and physically taken a stand against a man whom he has called father. He has symbolically killed him and now has freedom now to do what he likes without any

interference from the parental figure. We can link this step in the Bildungsroman to Janie in Their Eyes Were Watching God at the point when she decides that her grandmother's view of the world was entirely too restrictive. She chooses to leave behind that philosophy and to search for one of her own, one that does not take the horizon and "pinch it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about [Janie's] neck tight enough to choke her" (89), just as Ned seems to be doing to John.

John's important Bildungsroman step from provinciality to the larger society is represented by his subsequent crossing of the creek. The creek is the symbol of the division of the countryside milieu of his youth and the urban atmosphere of his future. The "city" is where he will go to be independent and receive his education.

As much as he would like to be a truly independent entity, however, John is a person who needs guidance and someone to tell him what to do and be. Perhaps this requirement, unlike other Bildungsroman characteristics, is the basis for his failure to reconcile himself to his community and ultimately to his own individuality. He has a very limited internal compass in terms of his morality and his sense of responsibility and as a result cannot override his desires with what he knows to be right, though he does continue to try. We can see this central conflict in John early in the story. He has just started courting Lucy while he is living on the Pearson plantation, yet he cannot resist the physical temptation of another woman, Mehaley.

> Mehaley said, "John, Ah thought once me and you wuz gointer make uh wed." He stood stolid and silent.
>
> In the silence she threw her arms about John's passive neck and swung herself off the ground, then lay still against him. [...]
>
> "John, hug me till mah dress fit tight."

> The next day John whitewashed Pheemy's chimney, and wrote Lucy's name in huge letters across it. [...]
>
> "Hope ole big-mouf M'haley don't come pukin' her guts 'round heah," he thought aloud. This was another day and another place. Pearson's quarters and M'haley had no business here. [...]
>
> "Lawd, dat look lak M'haley now – comin' heah tuh bulldoze and dominize."
>
> John fell to his knees and prayed for cleansing. He prayed aloud and the empty house threw back his resonant tones like a guitar box.
>
> "Dat sho sound good," John exulted. "If mah voice sound dat good de first time Ah ever prayed in de church house, it sho won't be de las'." He arose from his knees and before [Mehaley] reached the steps John had forgotten all about his sins and fears, but he retreated to the choir stand out of M'haley's reach. (48)

This series of events illustrates the essential conflict that John experiences throughout his life – what he should do and what he actually does. We also see the pattern that will recur throughout his life – after sinning, John retreats to the church for atonement and absolution, going so far as to become a pastor in order to give these things to others. Even in his choice of profession we see his inability to find balance between his responsibilities and his desires.

Though John tries, he cannot achieve what Janie does through her storytelling. Janie, by openly relating her experiences, good and bad, to her friend Pheoby, is able to make a positive contribution to the people around her and ultimately to herself. She learns from all that she has experienced and has a profound need to relate to others what she has discovered about herself and about human nature. John's distinct inability to open himself to others, probably stemming from overwhelming insecurity about his own worth, is what prevents him from reaching his potential as a catalyst for change not only in his own life but in the lives of others – his community.

One reason for John's lack of moral fortitude may be the result of one of the typical characteristics of the Bildungsroman story, the absence of a father figure. Buckley states in Season of Youth that "the loss of a father, either by death or alienation, usually symbolizes or parallels a loss of faith in the values of the hero's home and family and leads inevitably to the search for a substitute parent or creed" (19). John loses a father in two ways: His biological father is absent and he is profoundly alienated from his step-father. When he leaves his family home, he quickly finds another source of guidance in the person of Lucy Ann Potts, the young woman who becomes his first wife. Ultimately, this guidance, however well intended, does not assist John in maturing as fully as he should. Lucy becomes the voice of his conscience, which John never comes to truly develop on his own.

Lucy quickly becomes the most important person in John's life. We begin to understand the nature of their relationship at their first meeting and can see, through John's eyes, what a commanding and authoritative presence Lucy will be in John's life:

> One little girl with bright black eyes came and stood before him, arms akimbo. She must have been the leader, for several more came and stood back of her. She looked him over boldly from his tousled brown head to his bare white feet…He looked down at the feet of the black-eyed girl. Tiny little black shoes. (14, emphasis mine)

John immediately recognizes Lucy as an authoritative presence. The punitive nature of her gaze is felt immediately by him, and this ability of hers to perfectly read him (and anticipate him) is both a blessing and a curse to John. Lucy knows John to the depths of his soul. John realizes this, yet he will still try to hide parts of himself from her – most importantly, his sexuality.

> One girl behind her had breasts, must be around fourteen. He looked at her again. Some others were growing up too. In fact all were looking a little bit like women – all but the little black-eyed one. When he looked back into her face he felt ashamed. Seemed as if she had caught him doing something nasty. He shifted his feet in embarrassment. (14)

The emphasis on her tininess, her girlhood, is in sharp contrast to the womanhood he notices in the other girls. His tendency to look upon her as a non- or asexual being, illustrated by his noticing the girl-hood of Lucy and the womanhood of the females surrounding her, has far-reaching implications in their marriage. John feels that he can never live up to her ideal, and thus he feels he must go to other women to express the part of himself, his sexuality, which he feels Lucy does not approve of. As far as he is concerned, her unsullied, probing, omniscient eyes can see right through him to his deepest humanity and he is embarrassed at what he thinks she will find.

Anthony Wilson, in "The Music of God, Man, and Beast: Spirituality and Modernity in Jonah's Gourd Vine," suggests that Lucy serves as a direct refutation of everything that John has embodied up to now and that she ultimately serves to undermine his ability to align himself with the new world he encounters:

> When John reaches the far side of the creek and encounters Lucy, a crucial and ultimately tragic bifurcation begins in his understanding of his physical and spiritual selves. John's relationship with Lucy signifies the onset of the second stage in his spiritual development. Despite her abiding religious faith, Lucy in many ways signifies modernity. Hurston aligns her early on with education and financial success, and at their first meeting she shames John for the apparent backwardness of the life he has led. (68)

Lucy's presence in John's life plays a role in his Bildungsroman; indeed, she epitomizes and informs many of the aspects of the genre. She represents the sophistication of city

life, not only by her success in formal education, but because her parents are respected members of society. She encourages John in his self-education by example. She is his first "ordeal" in love. She helps him achieve his vocation as a preacher with her excellent career advice and she struggles to help him find a working philosophy. She also causes him to feel like there is a part of him that can never live up to the standards that she and the community at large set for him.

Under Lucy's "tutelage," John begins to learn of the larger world outside of his family's existence. At the very beginning of their relationship, Lucy assumes, in many ways, the role of teacher and John that of student. She encourages John, by her own example, in his schoolwork and public speaking: "He studied hard because he caught Lucy watching him every time he recited. He wrote on the ground in the quarters and in a week he knew his alphabet and could count to a hundred" (26). And later when he admires her for her speaking ability she says, "'You kin speak 'em better'n me, [...] you got uh good voice for speakin'" (31). And thus she encourages him through her unwavering faith in his abilities.

Throughout the novel, Lucy tells John what the best course of action is in any situation, but most importantly when he is in trouble with the community. Lucy seems to anticipate this trouble and very early in his preaching career she advises John:

> "Don't syndicate wid none of 'em [members of the church], do dey'll put yo' business in de street." Lucy went on, "Friend wid few. Everybody grin in yo' face don't love yuh. [...] You keep outa sight, and in dat way, you won't give nobody uh stick tuh crack yo' head wid." (97)

She has the ability to see into people's motives and inclinations and the advice she gives John, if heeded, will only do him good. She represents the conscience, or guiding principles that John should have developed on his own.

In some ways, however, Lucy defines John's needs for him and ultimately they are to her external advantage. After John beats up Lucy's brother for taking their bed, Lucy tells John that that behavior is not acceptable because "'Ah wants mah husband tuh be uh great man and look over 'em all so's Ah kin make 'em eat up dey talk. Ah wants tuh uphold yuh in ev'ything, but yuh know John, nobody can't fight war wid uh brick'" (83). Lucy tries to tell John that she will do everything in her power to help him be the man she (and by extension he) wants him to be. She also tells him that she cannot do it by herself; she needs him to have an investment in the process as well. It will take all their pooled resources for him (and again, by extension, her) to become successful.

He quickly learns that Lucy will hold him to higher, and perhaps more unrealistic standards than anyone else. She sets the tone for their discourse when they have a discussion about Lucy's homelife. Lucy says,

> "Mama always kin find plenty fuh folks tuh do."
> "But Ah mean in de night time, Lucy. When youse thru wid yo' work. Don't you do nothin' but warm uh chair bottom?"
> Lucy drew away quickly. "Oooh, John Buddy! You talkin' nasty."
> John in turn was in confusion. "Whuss nasty?"
> "You didn't hafta say 'bottom,'"
> John shriveled up inside. He intended to recite the rhymes to Lucy that the girls on the plantation thought so witty, but he realized that–
> Some love collards, some love kale
> But I loves uh gal wid uh short skirt tail.
> would drive Lucy from him in disgust. He could never tell her that. He felt hopeless about her. (31-32)

In this short exchange, the reader sees that Lucy has already set very strict boundaries for what John is allowed to talk about as well as restrictions on what is appropriate to discuss in regards to sexuality. John already knows that he must act a certain way to secure Lucy's love and this fact is in itself a limitation to his personal growth; he is not allowed to bare all sides of himself.

We again see Hurston's unique perspective on the Bildungsroman genre in that she stresses the importance of the protagonist's romantic partner in helping to 1) not only accompany him on his journey, but actually 2) to sculpt who the protagonist becomes. The role that the lover plays in Hurston's story is important because she not only will help to shape who John is but is in fact already doing so.

It is obvious that it is not all John's fault that his sexuality cannot be truly recognized within their marriage, however. We see in many passages in the early part of their relationship that Lucy is not necessarily comfortable with her own sexuality, much less the mystery of John's. Besides being offended at the word "bottom," when John races Lucy home and she has to confront the river snake, we see that she has some deep-seated reservations about sex. When he asks her what she is afraid of she replies, "Uh great big ole cotton-mouf moccasin. He skeers me, John. Everytime Ah go 'cross dat foot-log Ah think maybe Ah might fall in and den he'll bite me, or he might reah hisself up and bite me anyhow" (33). When John goes to destroy the snake, ultimately assuring that he and Lucy will not have the sexual relationship that he desires, he

> snatched the foot-log from its place and, leaning far back to give it purchase, he rammed it home upon the big snake and held it there. The snake bit at the log again and again in its agony, but finally the biting and

> the thrashing ceased. John fished the snake out and stretched it upon the grass. (33)

John has laid his own undoing, in the form of the phallic snake, at his side. This is still not enough for Lucy; she needs to be carried across the creek by John: "'Doncha lemme fall, John. Maybe 'nother ole snake down dere'" (34). By not allowing Lucy to face her fears, treating her more like he is "uh mother and uh father" (68) to her, he is not able to truly be her husband and is therefore also not able to make an important step in his journey to maturity.

The most striking example of the nature of their relationship appears when John is in trouble with his congregation. We are reminded again of the importance of the community in the African American Bildungsroman model. In this particular instance, John has a specific role in the community as their pastor, a position that comes with strictly prescribed behavior. This is different from Janie's situation in that her role was more tacitly understood as the wife of a powerful man. Here, John must account for very specific behavior, namely his adulterous relationships. The congregation has known for a long time that he has relationships with other women, but the bubbling resentment, furthered by his involvement with his current female interest, Hattie, finally comes to a head. He will lose his position if he does not do something. Lucy, who has suffered in her own way because of John's infidelity, gives him the advice that temporarily saves him. She implores him to tell the congregation what he cannot tell her – the truth:

> You preach uh sermon on yo'self, and you call tuh they remembrance some uh de good things you done, so they kin put it long side de other and when you lookin' at two things at de same time neither one of 'em don't look so big, but don't tell uh lie, John. If youse guilty you don't need tuh

> git up dere and put yo' own name on de sign post uh scorn, but don't say you didn't do it neither. Whut you say, let it be de truth. Dat what comes from de heart will sho reach de heart agin. (104)

Her advice pays off for John. At the end of his touching, self-deprecating sermon in which he claims to be just a "crumblin' clod" that God speaks through, a "natchel man," he asks for their forgiveness and is ready to give up his calling as their pastor. As he begins to step down from the pulpit,

> strong hands were there to thrust him back. The church surged up, a weeping wave about him. Deacons Hambo and Harris were the first to lay hands upon him. His weight seemed nothing in many hands while he was roughly, lovingly forced back into his throne-like seat. (105)

This section of the novel is also a larger metaphor for why John has not been able to resolve his wants and needs. John constantly has enablers around him – his wife, the congregation – who allow him to make the same mistakes repeatedly.

Gary Cluba in his article, "The Worm Against the Word: The Hermeneutical Challenge in Hurston's Jonah's Gourd Vine," suggests that John is ultimately a victim of his inability to reconcile his actions to his conscience. Cluba says,

> Although the Reverend Pearson wins glory as a spokesman of sacred truths while in the church, he does not achieve the final stage of the interpretive process, what Ricoeur calls "appropriation." The poetic language of his preaching, like the revelatory discourse of the Bible, proposes "a world" [one] may inhabit and wherein [one] can project [one's] ownmost possibilities (Ricoeur "Toward" 102.). However, John does not permanently enter into this transfigured cosmos and make it his own. When his prayers and sermons have been completed, he follows the example of the prophet by the gourd vine: He lives at odds with the Word and his words. (126)

This dual nature of John's is no more in evidence than in his relationship with Lucy. This dichotomy in John's mind between Lucy's purity and his own primal desires is perhaps the most crucial deviation that John makes from the traditional model of the Bildungsroman and is the fatal flaw that prevents him from a successful marriage of his wants and his needs. He will never be content with himself if this internal war is not resolved and he does not have the tools to resolve it. Up to now, Lucy has been his guiding force but about this aspect of his life, his sexuality, he is not allowed to talk with her.

To John, Lucy represents responsibility, not only to himself and to her, but to their family and community. When John is faced with the possible death of his daughter due to typhoid, instead of staying and being a support to his wife and child, he goes to the other woman, to whom he has made no promises. He says to Lucy,

> "Ah can't stand 'round and see mah baby girl die. Lucy! Lucy! God don't love me. Ah got tuh go 'way 'til it's all over. Ah jus' can't stay."
>
> So John fled to Tampa away from God, and Lucy stayed by the bedside alone. He was gutted with grief, but when Hattie Tyson found out his whereabouts and joined him, he suffered it, and for some of his hours he forgot about the dying Isis, but when he returned a week later and found his daughter feebly recovering, he was glad. He brought Lucy a new dress and a pineapple.

In his waves of self-disgust and weakness, he feels like even God has abandoned him. He believes that every dishonorable thing he does and every weakness he has are unforgivable and that he must flee to where he will not, in his own mind, be judged. This lack of self-love and the feeling that he is unlovable, even from the most fundamental source, God, are perhaps why John is unable to progress in the Bildungsroman model.

He does not possess the sense of self-worth that is necessary in anyone wishing to develop emotionally.

The difference between John and other characters of the Bildungsroman genre lies in what Buckley describes as "inner-directed[ness]." He defines it as a "sense of duty to the self and to others, a sense perhaps inculcated or sharpened by parents and childhood conditioning" (23). We have seen many times from John's actions that he has very little, if anything, of this inner guidance. Because Lucy has served as his conscience for so long, John now lacks the ability to find the proper course of action on his own. John shares the same weaknesses as other male Bildungsroman characters; however, he does not come to the same conclusion. Buckley describes male Bildungsroman characters like David Copperfield, who "has an errant heart;" Pip, who "misdirects his ambitions and affections;" and most appropriately, "Sammy Mountjoy, who "deliberately compromises his freedom when he lets himself be governed by a selfish lust" (22). Each of these characters somehow "experiences privileged moments of insight, epiphanies, spots of time, when the reality of things breaks through the fog of delusion. And each then feels a responsibility for change of heart and conduct" (22-23). John also experiences these moments of lucidity, as when he is making his great sermon to the congregation, when Lucy dies – some would argue of a broken heart – and when he finds his final love interest, Sally. He seems powerless, however, to change his behavior. He has countless times abandoned Lucy in her greatest need and ultimately betrays her love by not acknowledging to her, as much as he knows he should, the importance her guidance has played in his life. Readers are led to believe that if he had been able to make this

acknowledgement, his Bildungsroman may have ended more satisfactorily. He would have proven not only that he understood Lucy's sacrifices for him, but also that the sacrifices would have been unnecessary had he been able to be his own guiding force. Before her death, John is

> afraid to be alone with Lucy. His fear of her kept him from his bed at night. He was afraid lest she should die while he was asleep and he should awake to find her spirit standing over him. He was equally afraid of her reproaches should she live, and he was troubled. More troubled than he had ever been in all his life. In all his struggles of sleep, the large bright eyes looked through and beyond him and saw too much. He wished those eyes would close and was afraid again because of his wish. (112)

She is still, in his mind, childlike – someone he was supposed to protect, which he failed to do. While she is being shrouded, the image that is evoked is that of "Little Lucy" (113), still the little girl who could see through to the things held in his heart. She was also a mother figure to him, representing not only a haven, but also the person who had the right to berate him for his wrongdoing.

He weeps to himself, "Po' thing…She don't have tuh hear no mo' hurtin' things" (113). Yet John still prides himself on keeping Lucy all these years, in spite of his neglect and abuse. When Sam, a townsperson, comments, "Funny thing, aint' it John – Lucy come tuh town twelve years uhgo in mah wagon and mah wagon took her uhway" (115), his reply betrays his priorities: "'Yeah, but she b'longed tuh me, though, all de time,' John said and exulted over his friend" (115). Lucy's value to John was not only in their private life, but she provided a public value to him that boosted him in the eyes of the community. Genevieve West points out in her article "Feminine Subversion in Zora Neale Hurston's Jonah's Gourd Vine" that "Lucy's character is complex: She teeters

between the conventional submissive wife and a feminist willing to shape life in the public sphere" (504). We can understand Lucy as a woman living in two worlds. She is tolerant of her husband's multiple abuses because she believes her role of wife is one that she has willingly undertaken when she decides to marry him, but she also surpasses the role that many wives in her situation would take in her unceasing effort to boost John in the public sphere. If John had been a self-directed person, Lucy's input would have been excessively helpful. Given his traits, she is a hindrance to John's growth as a mature, responsible person.

His possession of Lucy, the most perfect woman in the world, is more important to John than the hurt this possession causes – the pain of their relationship and the insufficiently appreciated value Lucy adds to his life, not to mention recognition of the life she led and the price it cost her. West believes that Hurston is attempting to make a statement about the consequences of women being submissive to patriarchy:

> The utter failure of playing the idealized, domestic, long-suffering wife makes a clear feminist statement [...] Lucy falls into the trap of waiting for John to become the benevolent patriarch. Even on her death bed she tries to reform John and confronts him about his failings as a father and husband. Although Lucy dies the wife of an ungrateful and unfaithful man, she understands her mistake: She has loved John more than herself (506).

Lucy's death also allows John, if he identifies the possibility, to develop his own moral compass – to identify and correct his destructive and hurtful outlook and behavior. He fails, however, to recognize this opportunity.

John's inability to see the error in his thinking and action, though not typical of a Bildungsroman, does not mean that it does not fit into the mold in other ways. In fact, it

contributes in its way to another fundamental component of the Bildungsroman – alienation. When John marries Hattie Tyson, shortly after Lucy's death, his fall from grace within his community, and from his vocation in the pulpit, truly begins. John no longer has Lucy to lead him in the right direction and Hattie is certainly not the one to take the job. Still, John is looking for someone else to blame for his actions and assigns Hattie the role. Hattie, in her defense and probably to her credit, refuses to be a "Lucy" to John. She says to John, after he indicts her for not being Lucy, "'Naw, Ah ain't no Miss Lucy, 'cause Ah ain't goin' tuh cloak yo' dirt fuh yuh. Ah ain't goin' tuh take offa yuh what she took so you kin set up and be uh big nigger over mah bones'" (122). Even Hattie recognizes the role Lucy played in John's life. Though she may never understand the love behind it, she can see what the results are for John and for Lucy. Lucy, in effect, is an impediment to John's growth. Though we will never know the effect on his path to self-development had Lucy not been a part of the story, we can see that she enabled him to continue to deceive and injure each of them with his destructive behavior.

It is not until John is brought down to his lowest level – in his disgraceful divorce from Hattie – that he begins to see why his life has turned out as it has. His disregard for how his actions affect others causes him to become the target of anger and resentment. He sees that people who were his "friends" are now just as vehemently his enemies. Out of their jealousy of his previous position of respect and honor, they are now eager to pull him down to beneath their own level and in this instance we can see that the community itself can be a hindrance to John's growth and recognition of his flaws. Hurston eloquently describes this phenomenon:

> The toadies were there. Armed with hammers. Ever eager to break the feet of fallen idols. Contemptuous that even the feet of idols should fall among them. No fury so hot as that of a sycophant as he stands above a god that has toppled from a shrine. Faces of gods must not be seen of him. He has worshipped beneath the feet so long that if a god but lowers his face among them, they obscene it with spit. (138)

What she is saying is that there is no room for compassion for those who never needed it before – who indeed seemed to be immune to adversity. In most Bildungsroman stories, there is a time when the protagonist finds her or himself ostracized from the community. As in Their Eyes Were Watching God, the community can shift its loyalties, leaving the growth of the protagonist in a dynamic relationship with and against the community's values. John's personality is such that he is not able to grow in relation to the community, only to manipulate it. He has always said, with Lucy's help, exactly what is needed to avoid ruin. The only thing he learns from his near-escapes is that he only needs to know what to say. What he does not apprehend is that the community believes he is genuine. Ultimately, what we see in the above passage is that the community will not engage in a dynamic relationship with John anymore. He has lost their good faith and cannot regain it. Philip Joseph in "The Verdict from the Porch: Zora Neale Hurston and Reparative Justice" makes an astute observation about John's inability to assimilate to the community's values and the effect it has on him:

> Characters like John must hold themselves to some standard of justice without knowing whether it's the right one – without acting, that is, as if it certainly were the right standard. John's failure to assign his desire any limits, then, has its sinful counterpart in the certainty with which some members of his congregation determine his guilt and seek his punishment. (465)

Simply put, John cannot internalize the values that his community holds. He truly does not have the ability, consciously or unconsciously, to incorporate into his own mores the morality of his congregation. Joseph, however, also condemns the congregation for its inability to practice mercy in treating John's shortcomings.

Ultimately, though, John can only come through this tragedy by realizing a few truths for himself:

> His words had been very few since his divorce. He was going about learning old truths for himself as all men must, and the knowledge he got burnt his insides like acid [...] The world had turned suddenly cold [...] Lucy must have had good eyes. She had seen so much and told him so much it had wearied him, but she hadn't seen all this. Maybe she had, and spared him. She would. Always spreading carpets for his feet and breaking off the points of thorns. But and oh, her likes were no more on this earth! (144).

This passage is revealing, especially when placed in contrast to Janie's moment of self-awareness in Their Eyes Were Watching God when she talks about knowing that she has to separate her feelings: "She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them" (72). John is never aware that these two realities exist, nor how it would benefit him to know himself more intimately. Someone else, Lucy, saw his dual nature and tried to help him fumble through his life. This help does little good, however, unless the person can come to find these truths for himself. For John, this realization comes too late. He finally realizes that Lucy was more of a parent to him than he had ever promised to be to her. Without her protection and guidance he is now vulnerable to other people. There is no one now who will lead his steps or make excuses for him. He is finally aware that he is responsible for his own actions.

For John, there is no solution to his current predicament but to leave the community. He has discovered that any rational existence, contained in the mandate that he behave responsibly – that is, that he withstand temptations of the flesh – is really the most productive course of action for him. It leads him in the direction of Sally Lovelace, an altered iteration of Lucy's character. Sally is a widow living in Plant City who, as the name of the city implies, provides some shelter for John. Our first vision of Sally is that of "a tall black woman who smiled at him over a gate" (155). We are already reminded of the first time that John meets Lucy as he "leaned upon the fence and stared" (14) at her. Sally offers John everything he needs. First she recognizes him as a talented preacher from Eatonville who has no business wasting himself on the carpentry that he has taken up to make a living, calling him "too big uh man" (157), reminding us of Lucy's plans for John. She goes on to make him supper, insisting that he sit at the head of the table, and deprecates herself by refusing to eat with him, fanning the flies while he eats. Sally believes in John's spirit, even after he confesses all his faults and his past to her. She is the Lucy-like force that he needs to get his sense of self-respect back. Though the patterns of co-dependency threaten to creep back into his life, he finds the strength he needs in Sally. They marry and John returns to preaching, another reversion to a pattern in his old life. John has placed himself in the exact situation that he was in with Lucy and this action reveals that John has learned nothing from his past mistakes and decisions.

Sally is not wholly exempt from blame however. West points out that "Sally, like Lucy, has so absorbed patriarchal norms that cast her in the role of caretaker that she

effaces herself in order to promote her husband. Thus, her marriage, too, becomes a site of betrayal" (508). The couple lives happily until John returns to Eatonville. He is again tempted by a young girl and betrays Sally. Distracted while driving home, he is hit and killed by a train:

> The ground-mist lifted on a Florida sunrise as John fled homeward. The car droned "ho-o-ome" and tortured the man. False pretender! Outside show to the world! Soon he would be in the shelter of Sally's presence. Faith and no questions asked. He had prayed for Lucy's return and God had answered with Sally. He drove on but half-seeing the railroad from looking inward. (167)

His death by the train, the pounding, insistent, phallic instrument which has guided him his whole life, can be considered a fitting, even preferred ending to the novel. Even though John finally recognizes his accountability for his actions – and sees how devastating they are to other people – he still needs Lucy (Sally) to be his haven. He has not achieved the status of having an independent code of ethics. He is still running from his demons and they finally catch up with him.

Buckley asserts that

> even when he sees the error of his ways and judgments, the hero is by no means guaranteed a resolution to his problems at all comparable to the joyous denouement of Wilhelm Meister …some of the Bildungsromane end with the death of the protagonist.[…] perhaps most conclude more or less uncertainly, with an open question about the hero's final choice. (24)

The conclusion of this story is in direct contrast to Janie's in Their Eyes Were Watching God. In that story, the protagonist brings us to the end of her narrative knowing that she has grown into the woman that she wanted to become from the very beginning. We know that she has achieved actualization because she is able to relate her story to

someone in the community who can recognize the universality of her journey. For John, he is utterly alone with his failed attempt at finding his place, not only in his own skin, but in his family and his community.

The reader of Jonah's Gourd Vine is left with a sense of sadness and dissatisfaction. A man in whose life we have become intimately involved has failed to overcome his Achilles' heel – represented perhaps in the line describing his death: "The engine struck the car squarely and hurled it about like a toy. John was thrown out and lay perfectly still. Only his foot twitched a little" (167) – and to grasp the peaceful life we know he could have had. In his essay, "The Spirituality of Jonah's Gourd Vine" in Zora Neale Hurston, Larry Neal describes the dichotomy in which John Pearson was forced to live:

> John Pearson is a poet. That is to say, one who manipulates words in order to convey to others the mystery of that Unknowable force which we call God. He is more; he is the intelligence of the community, the bearer of its traditions and highest possibilities. But [...] he is also human and, as such, beset with the burdens and temptations of human existence. As poet, his power rests in his projection of the Word. As bearer of the Word, he is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. His tragic dilemma is that he can be fully neither one nor the other, especially on the basis of some abstract morality. (27)

John is forced by his community to live up to ideals that he could not achieve. He is able, as a poet, to convey to others the magnificence of his congregation's god, but he cannot, in his own life, internalize what he is preaching. Janie, in Their Eyes Were Watching God, is able to do the exact opposite; she internalizes everything that happens to her and only later, after she makes sense of it herself, is able to share the truth she comes to

know. Both are storytellers, but John tries to be one before he knows himself and Janie only attempts to become one after.

Conclusion

In her novels, Their Eyes Were Watching God and Jonah's Gourd Vine, Zora Neale Hurston takes an approach to the Bildungsroman genre that is unique in relation to her contemporaries. While much of the African American literature in general and Bildungsroman of the time in particular was concerned with advancing the political cause of the African American people, Hurston chose, however controversially, to focus not on politics, but on humanity.

Her works reveal that she was more concerned with the health of the African American psyche than with whether her culture was appreciated by those outside of it. Hurston does consider ethnicity in her writing, but only in the most benign sense; she does not make it an overt factor in the fates of her characters. Their cultural history is a source of pride and profound strength. The folk influence and dialect that infuse her stories attest to the completeness of a culture that does not need to look outside of itself for affirmation or approval.

Not only does Hurston use her writing to examine the many facets of ethnicity but also, and perhaps more directly, the effects of gender on the movement, motivation, and fortune of a character. The importance of gender and the implications it has in his or her story seem to have more profound consequences than race for a character in one of Hurston's stories. It is often the protagonist's gender that determines, through his or her

relationships with parents, spouses and community, what is expected behaviorally of him or her.

For Janie Starks, any expectations of what she should do or who she should be are carefully filtered through a value system that she develops through her relationships with her parental figure and her community, but most importantly, her spouses. She is able to fashion a philosophy about life that allows her to live in satisfaction with what she has endured, learned, and become. She realizes that all of the ideals she has about life when her story begins are ultimately reconcilable and even compatible with the life that she has led and is leading as she emerges as an independent person at the end, in control of her fate.

John Pearson is not able to make this reconciliation. Though Hurston does not allow John the same favorable ending that she gives Janie we still see, in terms of the protagonist's relationship with his spouse and lovers, how her depictions of ethnicity and gender differ from the typical Bildungsroman that her contemporaries were writing. Hurston's ability to dissociate her characters from the pathos that surrounded other fiction of the time, particularly the Bildungsroman genre, reiterates her aspiration to depict African Americans as people and not categories.

The fact that John is a male character who is dealt a death without internal resolution could be argued by some to be Hurston's statement about the gender issues that she dealt with and we are still dealing with today. Gender roles and the issues that grow out of them are, however, universally present in any ethnicity or group and as such, seem to be Hurston's main concern in her stories of Janie and John. Perhaps in her

refusal to make her male narrative a success story, Hurston is making a larger statement about the progress that she wants to see made on this front.

Hurston was a woman, author, performer and anthropologist ahead of her time. Her insistence on trying to live her life without the restrictions artificially placed on her by her gender and ethnicity is still a transcendent ideal nearly 50 years after her death. Her desire to aid her readership to aspire to the same ideal has given all of us the gift that one of her literary ancestors hoped would come from an African American novelist. William Sanders Scarborough, one of the first African American classical scholars, served as president of Wilberforce University between 1908 and 1920 after having been born into slavery. In a plea that seems meant for Hurston, he wrote in 1899:

> We are tired of vaudeville, of minstrelsy and of the Negro's pre-eminence in those lines. We want something higher, something more inspiring than that. We turn to the Negro for it. Shall we have it? The black novelist is like the white novelist, in too many instances swayed by the almighty dollar. [...] Like Esau he is ready to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage.
>
> Let the Negro writer of fiction make of his pen and brain all-compelling forces to treat that which he well knows, best knows, and give it to the world with all the imaginative power possible, with all the magic touch of an artist. Let him portray the Negro's loves and hates, his hopes and fears, his ambitions, his whole life, in such a way that the world will weep and laugh over the pages, finding the touch that makes all nature kin, forgetting completely that hero and heroine are God's bronze images, but knowing only that they are men and women with joys and sorrows that belong alike to the whole human family. Such is the novelist that the race desires. Who is he that will do it? Who is he that can do it? (Scarborough, quoted in Gates 180)

Hurston did all of the things Scarborough asked for. The fact that it was a woman who answered his call is perhaps the most appropriate response that could have been given this request. In a culture that valued male storytelling, Hurston's was a voice that

ultimately exemplified and surpassed the expectations of a culture that craved an accurate expression of communal hope and self-respect. Though she was not critically appreciated in her own time, it is through the lens of self-reflection that we, as a culture, have come to understand the significant contribution she has made to our understanding of ourselves, others, and everyone's unique contribution to the society that we live in, struggle with, and hope for.

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